PAO finds no inconsistency in reports on COVID expenses, reimbursements. PAGE 2
CNMI mourns loss of Ross Manglona. PAGE 3

Hafa Adai!

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Pro-Palestine group calls for ceasefire

FERDIE DE LA TORRE

Members and supporters of the Marianas for Palestine hold a peaceful rally in front of the Legislature building on Capital Hill yesterday morning to call for a ceasefire and end to the Israel-Hamas war.

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

» Some lawmakers express support to group's call for ceasefire, end of war

A group of activists in solidarity with Palestine held a peaceful rally in front of the Legislature building on Capital Hill yesterday and called for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war.

In a demonstration that occurred just as the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation was holding

See CEASEFIRE on Page 4

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

Hekido Kaipat Helgen leaves Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph Camacho's court room following his bail hearing yesterday.

Firefighter arrested for alleged assault with dangerous weapon

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A firefighter for the Commonwealth Ports Authority's Aircraft Rescue and Firefighting unit was arrested last week for allegedly threatening a man with a rifle following a heated argument.

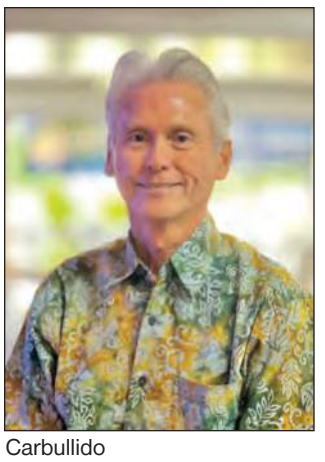
See FIREFIGHTER on Page 4

Carbullido: AI a strong yet dangerous tool

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Guam Supreme Court Justice F. Philip Carbullido believes that artificial intelligence can both be a strong tool and a dangerous tool for those working in the judicial system.

That's because it can be useful to lawyers and other members of the judiciary, but can also be dangerous in terms of the correctness of the information it contains, he said. For instance, by just one simple question, AI can provide one with a plethora of information and can even put it together anyway one would want, even in the form of a legal brief. And the danger is in the accuracy of that brief.



Carbullido

This was the particular focus on the first day of the three-day conference being hosted by the Pacific Judicial Council on Saipan, particularly in terms of how technology

See TOOL on Page 4

Mobile and resilient, US military is placing new emphasis on ground troops for Pacific defense

AP

In this photo released by the U.S. Army, U.S. Army aircraft assigned to the 25th Combat Aviation Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, fly into Kahuku Training Area, Hawaii, Nov. 2, 2023, during JPMRC.

By DAVID RISING
Associated Press

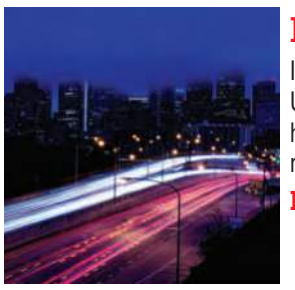
BANGKOK (AP)—As Chinese missile testing in the waters around Taiwan grew increasingly aggressive in 1996, the U.S. sailed two aircraft carrier groups to the island that Beijing claims as its own, and China was forced to back down.

It employed a similar response to Hamas' surprise attack on Israel a month ago, dispatching two carrier groups to the eastern Mediterranean in a rapid and massive show

See MOBILE on Page 4

INSIDE

LOCAL
NMC Board of Regents chair Charles V. Cepeda has been appointed to serve on the ACCT Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.
PAGE 7



BUSINESS
It's not just you. Across the U.S., prices at the pump have felt milder in recent months.
PAGE 11

WORLD
Hamas and Israel released more hostages and prisoners under terms of a fragile cease-fire that held for a fifth day.
PAGE 12

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Local

PAO finds no inconsistency in reports on COVID-19 expenses, reimbursements

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Public Assistance Office officer Patrick Guerrero has found no inconsistency in the reports made by Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP), Gov. Arnold I. Palacios, and the U.S. Government Accountability Office regarding the CNMI's COVID-19 response expenses and Federal Emergency Management Agency's reimbursements for pandemic expenses.

Guerrero, who is also the Governor's Authorized Representative, informed Senate President Edith E. DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan) in a letter dated Nov. 15, 2023, that he believes background information or clarification are necessary to understand the reported figures.

In an Open Government Act request last Oct. 30, DeLeon Guerrero asked Guerrero for information regarding the CNMI's COVID-19 expenses from 2020 to 2023 and FEMA reimbursements for COVID expenses.

In PAO's response, Guerrero said Sablan's reports on both occasions in August 2023 for the $9.8 million in obligations and October 2023 for the $21.4 million are confirmed amounts awarded to the CNMI.

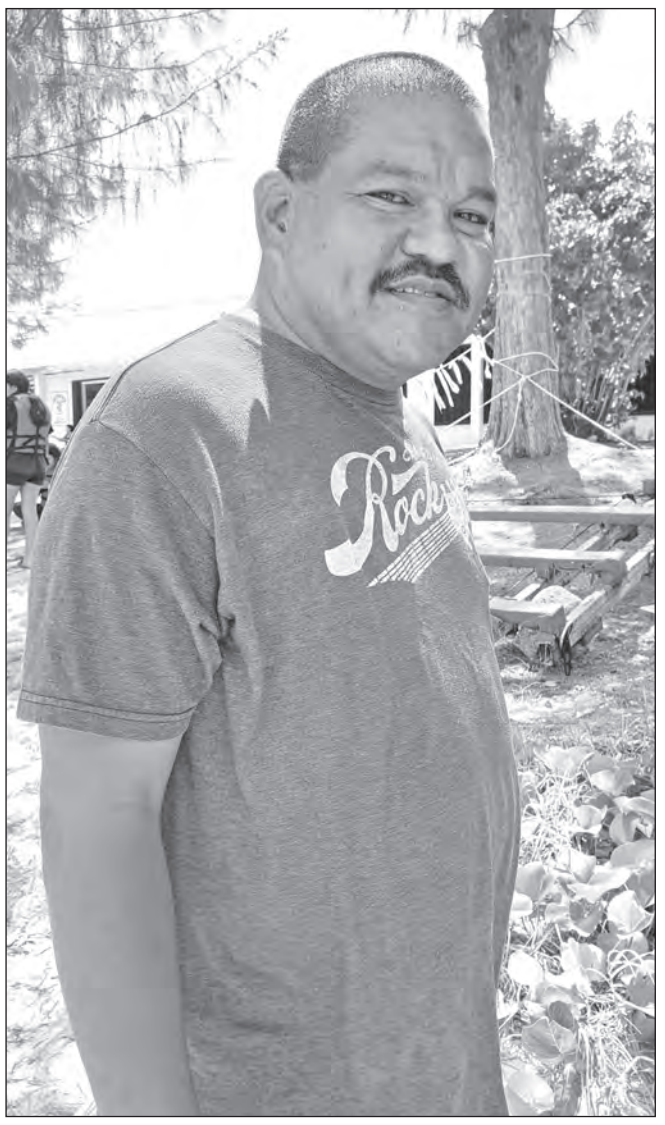
The PAO officer said Palacios' announcement in October 2023 is also accurate when his office disclosed receiving $22.1 million—the $21.4 million reported by Sablan and close to $700,000 that was awarded around the same time but not reported by Sablan.

He said it's not $21.1 million as DeLeon Guerrero stated in her letter.

DeLeon Guerrero said that Palacios also stated that over the last 10 months (January 2023 through October 2023) the CNMI received approximately $36 million in reimbursements, bringing the total amount obligated to the PAO grants to $98.1 million for the

See PAO on Page 3

CNMI mourns loss of Ross Manglona



FERDIE DE LA TORRE
Ross Hugh S. Manglona is shown here in this photo.

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The Palacios-Apatang administration and the people of the CNMI are mourning the loss of Ross Hugh Songao Manglona, resident executive of the Office of Indigenous Affairs, who passed away on Monday at the age of 47.

Funeral/memorial service will be at the Mount Carmel Cathedral Church on Saipan on Monday, Dec. 4, at 8am, and at the San Francisco de Borja Church in Songsong, Rota, on Dec. 6, Wednesday, at 10am.

The cause of Manglona's passing was not immediately disclosed.

Gov. Arnold I. Palacios said he and Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang mourn the loss of a friend and a dedicated public servant who tirelessly championed the cause of protecting and preserving the indigenous Chamorro and Carolinian culture and heritage.

"In Ross's passing, we not only lose a valuable member of our cCabinet but also a steadfast advocate for our people," said the governor in a statement.

Palacios said Manglona's contributions at the Northern Marianas College, Northern Marianas Technical Institute, and the Office of Indigenous Affairs, as well as his unwavering commitment to preserving the rich tapestry of the Chamorro and Carolinian heritage, are unparalleled.

"Let us honor his memory by continuing the important work he started. The CNMI community offers it prayers for his eternal rest and for his family during this difficult time," Palacios said.

500 Sails co-founder and executive director Pete Perez said yesterday that Manglona was the director of 500 Sails' Cultural Maritime Training Center until his health began to fail.

Perez said Manglona was an incredibly talented man who knew how things worked and got things done.

He said Manglona's passion was his community and his work aimed to improve peoples' lives and to protect the indigenous heritage—both Chamorro and Refaluwasch (another term for Carolinian).

"A life well lived doesn't cover it. He used every minute that he had left to help the community that he loved," Perez said.

Frances M. Sablan, a former Commonwealth Election Commission board chair, said Manglona and his staff partnered with the Commonwealth Arts Council to have artisans conduct presentations in schools during Cultural Heritage Month.

Sablan said their local organization, Inetnum Kutturan Natibun Marianas/Kkoor Aramasal Marianas (a local cultural group) shared office space with Manglona at the Indigenous Affairs Office.

"He was a hardworking, determined, focused, and vocal leader. He is truly missed," she said.

Palacios appointed Manglona to serve as the resident executive of the Office of Indigenous Affairs last February. The Senate confirmed his appointment last March.

Manglona previously served as the director of Continuing Education & Workforce Development for the Northern Marianas Trades Institute, and as a dean for the NMC-Cooperative Research Extension and Education Service. He also served as director of the Cultural Maritime Training Center at 500 Sails.

Falling fuel prices result in FAC decrease

The Commonwealth Utilities Corp. has been notified by Mobil Oil Mariana Islands, Inc. that there has been a decrease in the average international fuel oil prices which may affect the Fuel Adjustment Charge.

Pursuant to an order previously issued by the Commonwealth Public Utilities Commission, CUC is required to adjust (up or down) the FAC pass-through rate when the Mean of Platts Singapore monthly pricing equals or exceeds a 4.5% differential of the average per gallon cost of fuel used in the calculation of the current FAC rate.

As a result, the current FAC rate will decrease by $.04022 (4 cents) from S.30712 per kWh to S.26690 per kWh effective Dec. 1, 2023.

The FAC is one of two components that make up the CUC electric rate, which is strictly for fuel and fuel-related purchases. The second component is the CUC base rate, which is used to fund operations, projects, debt services, or any non-fuel related expenses. This base rate has not increased since April 2014. ***(CUC)***

PAO

From page 2

COVID pandemic that began in January 2020.

As for the GAO report released in September 2023, Guerrero said, it is also accurate that the time the information was gathered in May 2023, there were approximately $58 million in expenses submitted to FEMA for cost and eligibility reviews.

He said since June 2023, the CNMI has received $34.9 million of the reported $36 million that was obligated in that 10-month period, which would translate to a remaining potential reimbursement of around $23 million.

FERDIE DE LA TORRE
Public Assistance Office officer Patrick C. Guerrero.

However, since May of 2023, additional applications and submitted costs by eligible applicants is now estimated at $30 million, Guerrero said.

He said these amounts could fluctuate often and are not final.

The director said the project application period for all costs associated with the COVID response is currently being extended to February 2024 and therefore, the costs may increase as more submissions are received by their office.

Guerrero also responded to the Senate president's other requests for information regarding COVID-19 expenses and reimbursement.

HSC-25 invites the community to celebrate holidays with annual Santa Flight on Dec. 2

ASAN, Guam–The Helicopter Sea Combat Squadron (HSC) 25 Island Knights will conduct a Santa Flight over various locations in Guam beginning at 10am on Saturday, Dec. 2.

"We invite everyone to celebrate the holidays with HSC-25 as we fly Santa Claus on a tour around Guam," said LT. Tim Garripoli, HSC-25 public affairs officer.

"This Santa Flight is our way of spreading joy this holiday season and giving back to our island community."

Here is a list of times and locations for residents to view Santa in the sky.

- 10am: Andersen Air Force Base, Yigo
- 10:10am: University of Guam, Mangilao
- 10:15am: Pago Bay, Chalan Pago
- 10:25am: Talo'fo'fo
- 10:35am: Merizo
- 10:45am: Agat Bay
- 10:50am: U.S. Naval Base Guam, Santa Rita
- 11am: U.S. Naval Hospital Guam, Agana Heights
- 11:05am: Gov. Ricardo J. Bordallo Complex, Adelup
- 11:20am: Tumon Bay

HSC-25 is the Navy's only squadron that maintains a 24-hour search and rescue and medical evacuation alert posture, directly supporting the U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam and Joint Region Marianas. Since 1984, HSC-25 has launched more than 2,445 missions, resulting in 762 medical evacuations, and rescuing 475 lives from waters and jungles of the island chain. ***(PR)***

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PUBLIC NOTICE

11.16.2023

Notice for Public Comment

Reprogramming of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)-COVID Funds

Program Year/ IDIS No.:	Program:	Activity Name:	Subrecipient:	Approved Budget:	Proposed Reprogramming: Amount	Proposed Revised Project: Budget	Current IDIS Funded Amount:
IDIS# 720	CDBG-CV	Acquisition of a Mobile Clinic for Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation	Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation	$521,806.50	($69,719.52)	$452,086.98	$521,806.50
IDIS# 727	CDBG-CV	CDBG-CV Food Pantry Program (Karidat Social Services)	Karidat Social Services, Saipan	$391,292.05	($60.71)	$391,231.34	$391,292.05
IDIS# 718	CDBG-CV	CDBG-CV 19 Planning and Administrative (Purchase of Mobile Clinic for CHCC)		$27,463.50	($6,695.60)	$20,767.90	$27,463.50
IDIS# 724	CDBG-CV	CDBG-CV Emergency Housing Assistance (Mortgage Assistance)		$150,903.25	($75,996.69)	$74,906.56	$150,903.25
IDIS# 742	CDBG-CV	CDBG-CV Emergency Rental Payment Assistance		$110,000.00	($6,001.81)	$103,998.19	$110,000.00
		Total Reprogrammed from Activities:			**($158,474.33)**		
IDIS# 727	CDBG-CV	CDBG CV Food Pantry Program	Center for Living Independently in the CNMI	$126,465.50	$130,474.33	$256,939.83	$126,465.50
IDIS# 729	CDBG-CV	CDBG CV Food Pantry Program Planning and Administrative costs		$28,100.45	$28,000.00	$56,100.45	$28,100.45
		Total Reprogrammed to Activities:			**$158,474.33**		

Our agency through its Citizen Participation Plan (CPP) publishes a "Public Notice" on reprogramming funds over $100,001.00/Planning and Administrative Cost to a project activity, which constitutes as a substantial amendment. Therefore, any comments from the general public should be submitted to NMHC Central Office located in Garapan, Saipan, and to the Rota and Tinian Field Offices, on or before December 19, 2023 no later than 4:30 P.M. You may contact Ms. Zenie P. Mafnas, Deputy Corporate Director or Ms. Tricia Tenorio, Planner @ (670)234-6866/9447.

"NMHC is an equal employment and fair housing public agency"

CEASEFIRE

From page 1

a regular session yesterday morning, members and supporters of Marianas for Palestine chanted, "Free, free Palestine! From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free!"

Some SNILD members also expressed support for the group's call for a ceasefire in the Israel-Hamas war.

Businessman Salam Younis, who is one of the organizers of Marianas for Palestine, said in an interview that they're calling for a ceasefire to stop what he calls the genocide going on in Palestine, especially the killing of children.

Salam Younis' late father, Abed E. Younis, who was a Palestinian, was the founding publisher of the *Marianas Variety*.

Salam Younis said more than 8,000 children have been killed in the war and that they were at the Legislature yesterday to ask the CNMI's elected leaders to call for a ceasefire.

"We have good show [of] support. A lot of [representatives] are with us and on the side of humanity," he said.

The group, composed of less than 20 people, including a few children, held the rally in front of the Legislature building to coincide with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, which is usually celebrated on Nov. 29.

Salam Younis said they were aware that there was going to be a SNILD session so they decided to have the rally during that time.

"It was good decision because they allowed us to make our statement in their session," he said.

Salam Younis said they plan on doing more rallies and will have one after they deliver their collective statement to Delegate Gregorio Kilili C. Sablan (D-MP).

Many organizations in the CNMI signed the statement.

Salam Younis, his sister Suaad Castro Younis, Grace Choi, and Roberto Santos read the group's statement during the session's public comments portion.

Salam Younis said the Marianas for Palestine's collective demands are an immediate ceasefire in occupied Palestine; the immediate restoration of water, fuel, food, electricity and internet connectivity; and the end of military violence and oppression in the West Bank, among others.

Suaad Younis, a teacher, said the colonized people of the Marianas recognize that the root cause of the war in Palestine is one of colonization, racism and Zionist imperialism that demands power and control over vital natural resources and vulnerable human lives.

Furthermore, Suaad Younis said, they recognize that the extractive and violent war industry also profits from occupying lands and oppressing native peoples in the Pacific.

"We know that the ongoing hyper militarization of the Mariana Islands has grown out of a similar history of land dispossession, power grabs and denial of our sovereign indigenous rights," she said.

Choi Santos said the community groups and organizations of Collective Marianas for Palestine stand vehemently opposed to the ongoing genocide and forced displacement of Palestinian people, an enduring apartheid and siege in occupied Palestine.

Speaking as an indigenous person in the Marianas and as a member of the LGBTQ community, Roberto Santos said he is using his time to expressing solidarity with Palestine.

Santos called on military members and veterans in the communities to stand with them and demand an end to genocide and apartheid.

For decades, he said, Israel has consistently violated international laws and committed war crimes with total impunity.

Rep. Thomas John Manglona (R-Saipan) said he is not an expert on this issue so he tries his best to stay neutral on most issues to see both sides. However, if there's one thing that he can see, Manglona said, is that they cannot ignore the fact that this is not affecting people here.

"We do have a crowd that came up here to voice their concern and to show their passion for what they believe in and I truly respect that. I admire that," he said.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

TOOL

From page 1

can be a powerful tool in the judicial world. Carbullido said that one of the things members of the PJC learned in yesterday's conference was the use and how of AI.

"We've read in the press regarding the use of artificial intelligence and its strength. This is something that really can be very useful to lawyers [an] to judicial officers. But this can also be very dangerous in reference to making sure that the information is accurate," he said.

Carbullido said that when using AI, he has learned that one needs to be able to know how to contain and properly frame a question in order for information provided through AI to be useful and ensuring that AI isn't making things up.

"Because that's what we see in some of these briefs. It reads [well] but it's all made up by artificial intelligence. There are many things happening to try and lessen the risk that is involved and it's just how you frame the questions and how you restrict the inquiry, that's what we learned about. Attorneys may use artificial intelligence…to help them do the research and [they may] just pose a question and, without checking it and, say, the citations. Some of them could be made up case citations that you just submitted to the court," he said.

KIMBERLY B. ESMORES

The Pacific Judicial Council during its three-day technology conference at the Pacific Islands Club Saipan that focuses on how technology can be a powerful tool in the judicial world.

Still, he said, the use of technological tools like AI is critically important in this new age.

"The use of technology and how it intertwines with the work we do is critically important. It makes us more efficient, but you have to make sure that you use it in an intelligent and proper way. Like artificial intelligence, you can't just put in a question and when results come out, you use it and report it. You want to make sure that the information is accurate," he said.

"What we're learning here is that while technology can be critically important tools to be used in our work, there are risks that come with it too and you want to make sure that you have knowledge of what those risks are and what those limitations are. That's what this year's conference is about," Carbullido added.

The Pacific Judicial Council is made up of Guam, the CNMI, America Samoa, Palau, and the Federated States of Micronesia. Every island jurisdiction was represented in this year's conference.

The conference began yesterday and is expected to conclude on Friday, Dec. 1.

"We've got the best speakers across the nation to come out and present on [these] topics and we're just fortunate that we have an organization that has existed for over 20 years and we're able to bring this type of learning to our PJC jurisdictions. I just want the community to know that we do have an organization that tries, in every way, to improve the training and education of our judicial officers and lawyers and that they don't have to travel to the [U.S.] mainland to get this caliber of information," Carbullido said.

MOBILE

From page 1

of force meant to deter other countries or Iran-backed proxy groups such as Hezbollah from joining the fight.

But what is still viable in the Mideast is increasingly less practical with China, which in 1996 had no carriers of its own and little means to threaten the American ships, but now has the world's largest navy, including three aircraft carriers, and a coastline bristling with anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles.

Instead, ongoing exercises in Hawaii, which conclude Friday, highlight part of a new American approach to Pacific defense and deterrence, with a focus on small groups of mobile land forces operating from islands like those off China's coast.

In the exercises, the largest-scale training held in Hawaii so far, more than 5,000 troops from the 25th Infantry Division, along with units from New Zealand, Indonesia, Thailand and Britain and supported by the U.S. Air Force, have been practicing fighting in an island jungle environment against an advanced enemy force, with exercises including paratrooper drops, a long-range air assault, and re-supply by air and sea.

"All of those are examples of the importance of being able to project force here in the Pacific, which first requires seizing and holding ground and building up a base of operations where you can consolidate gains, secure and hold key infrastructure such as an airfield, and then introduce additional combat power," said Maj. Gen. Marcus Evans, commanding general of the 25th Infantry Division, in an interview from Wheeler Army Airfield on Oahu.

While the exercises are not officially directed against a specific threat, the U.S. Department of Defense in its report last month to Congress reiterated that it considers China its "pacing challenge" as "the only competitor to the United States with the intent and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order."

Even though China's navy is now larger than that of the U.S. in terms of numbers of ships, the U.S. Navy is still more capable and has 11 carriers to China's three, among other advantages. But where China's main focus is on its nearby waters, the U.S. Navy operates globally and in the event of a Taiwan conflict, it would take time for many of its assets to get to the region.

As part of its "Operation Pathways" revamp of Pacific defense set in motion nearly a decade ago, the U.S. has been increasing its number of exercises with partners in the Indo-Pacific. It has also been re-thinking the way its soldiers and Marines operate in the first island chain off of China, which includes southwestern Japanese islands, Taiwan and the northwest Philippines, and the second island chain, which includes the Mariana Islands and the heavily fortified American territory of Guam.

Those islands give them platforms from which anti-ship and anti-aircraft missiles can be launched by mobile units that can quickly relocate to avoid counter battery fire, said Euan Graham, a defense analyst with the Australian Strategic Policy Institute.

"The U.S. already has a positional advantage by being forward deployed and having allies there, so it wants to utilize that geography in its favor," Graham said. "And that helps the U.S. to overcome its numerical disadvantages as China's navy is continuing to expand. The U.S. has to do what it can to try and close the gap, and land forces are part of the equation."

FIREFIGHTER

From page 1

Hekido Kaipat Helgen, 25, is accused of beating his sister's boyfriend with the help of two minors on Nov. 24 and allegedly pointing a rifle at the victim.

Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph Camacho retained yesterday the $5,000 cash bail that was initially imposed on Helgen.

Kaipat is charged with assault with a dangerous weapon, assault and battery, and disturbing the peace.

During a bail hearing yesterday, Helgen's lawyer, Chief Public Defender Doug Hartig, asked the court to allow his client to post 10% of his bail so he may be released on his own recognizance. Hartig argued that his client is not a flight risk as he has a job and tight ties to the community.

Assistant attorney general Carmen Borja opposed this request, saying Helgen's bail should be kept at $5,000 as his alleged crime involves a firearm.

Camacho, for his part, said he wants to strike a balance because the concern isn't the bail amount but rather if the defense can provide the court with a suitable third-party custodian to be the eyes and ears of the court while Helgen is out on bail.

Camacho eventually denied the defense's motion for bail modification at this time, but gave him an opportunity to bring the matter back before the court when already has a suitable third-party custodian to propose.

Helgen was remanded back to Department of Corrections custody and was ordered to return to court on Dec. 6 for his preliminary hearing; he will be arraigned Dec. 11.

According to court documents, police responded last Nov. 10 to a disturbance-in-progress call at an apartment in San Antonio.

At the scene, police spoke with the alleged victim, who accused Helgen of assaulting him and pointing a rifle at him before leaving the scene in his truck.

The victim told police that Helgen had arrived at around 9:02pm at the apartment that he shares with his girlfriend who is also Helgen's sister.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

Ex-firefighter wants his 30-year sentence reduced

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

A former firefighter who is serving a 30-year prison sentence for sexually exploiting a child recently filed a motion to reduce his sentence, which the U.S. government has opposed.

Richard Sullivan Benavente, who pleaded to exploiting a minor in 2013, has filed a pro se (without a lawyer) motion to modify his 30-year sentence, pursuant to the recent 2023 Enactment and Sentencing Commission amendment that essentially amends the United States' sentencing guidelines.

These amendments address the sentencing disparities in criminal history, including those with no criminal history.

To be exact, there were 10 amendments made by the commission that have expanded the criteria for sentence reduction. Some of those amendments provide a decrease of two offense levels for "zero-point offenders" or offenders with no criminal history.

This means if a person had "zero criminal history points" prior to their conviction and did not commit a disqualifying offense like sex offense, hate crimes, etc., then that person may qualify for a two-level reduction off the final offense level the court imposed on that person.

"Petitioner attests that he has suffered a constitutional violation, and it immediately qualifies him for sentence modification. His crime and conviction show no such violence, threat, or physical force and does not rise to the level of the congressional definition for violence despite its standing as a sex offense. Congress has authorized the courts to use their discretion where applicability exists, as was the case with Compassionate Release," Benavente states.

Benvente further argues that, in his case, he meets the Sentencing Commission's criteria for a two-point reduction as no other federal conviction remains on his criminal history.

However, the United States has filed a motion opposing Benavente's motion, stating that he does not qualify for sentence reduction because he has not stated an extraordinary or compelling reason and does not qualify under the "adjustment for certain zero-point offenders" amendment because his conviction was a sex offense.

"The defendant has not alleged an extraordinary and compelling reason. He states that he meets the criteria because he has no other federal conviction in his history and no local infraction to rise to the list of the commission's exclusion. The lack of other federal convictions is not extraordinary nor compelling," said assistant U.S. Attorney Ashley Kost.

"Because Benavente was convicted of a sex offense and thereby does not qualify for the adjustment, there is no need for further consideration of the factors," Kost added.

Also, whether or not Benavente qualifies for a reduced sentence, there's still the issue of the seriousness of his crime and the government believes that Benavente's current sentence of 30 years reflects the severity of his crime, Kost further argues.

"The application of those factors and public safety also supports the denial of his motion. Benavente's conviction of sexual exploitation of children is a very serious offense. The nature and the circumstances of the offense are very troubling and included providing methamphetamine to minors and exploiting them while they were under the influence," Kost said. "Furthermore, the sentence must be a deterrent to other criminal conduct and protect the public from further crimes of the defendant. The sentence of 360 months in this case meets all those requirements."

According to *Saipan Tribune* archives, the Department of Public Safety received an anonymously sent video file in July 2013 depicting Benavente and a minor girl engaging in sexually explicit conduct.

In 2013, a federal jury indicted Benavente on several counts of sexual exploitation of a child. In February 2014, Benavente pleaded guilty to a count of sexual exploitation. He was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment.

MCCA to cap the year with Åmot Walk on Tinian

CAMI EGUROLLA

Participants in the Luta (Rota) Åmot Walk Tours stop for a photo on Rota from Nov. 10 to 12, 2023.

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
chrystal_marino@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

Having just completed their three-day Luta tour this past Nov. 10 to 12 as part of their Åmot Walk Tours throughout the Marianas, the Micronesian Climate Change Alliance is gearing up for their final Åmot Walk this upcoming month, this time on Tinian.

Cami Egurolla, director of Communications for the Micronesian Climate Change Alliance, told *Saipan Tribune* that this is going to be a significant event as it will cap the Åmot Walks for the year.

"We'll be going to Tinian and arriving on Dec. 8, leaving on Dec 12. Right now, because of the collaborating nature of it, we're still fine-tuning the itinerary. It's being led by Carmen and Dorothy San Nicolas. They'll be the one organizing and putting the itineraries together," she said. "The one on Tinian will be the last Åmot Walk that we'll have on an island. Right now on our flyers, Tinian is the last Island that we're going to be stopping by."

She conceded that it is part of their intention to incorporate the Northern Islands, but "we're not going to be able to go to any of the Northern Islands north of Saipan [right now]. If we do go ahead with our intentions for Gåni, it will probably be out on the water," she said.

That makes Tinian the last stop for Åmot Walk. "Tinian will be really important to this year's Åmot Walk because it will be closing out on a specific landmass," she added.

She said the Micronesian Climate Change Alliance is hoping to get the word out before they go to Tinian, especially with what's going on in the Pacific right now.

"There are a lot of calls to peace and the Åmot Walk is our way to offer prayer, and is even a sense of unity for the folks on our islands. While our islands are constantly being talked about in these political spaces…we want to make sure that folks are aware of what is going on, and feel called to join us as we call for peace and unity in Pacific," said Egurolla.

She said their past Åmot Walk on Luta had been a great experience as they joined with Lemai Love, Our Commonwealth 670, alongside the Municipality of Rota, the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs, and the Rota Municipal Council, for the three-day activity. She said they had a unity ceremony, as well as tours to various historically significant sites, a gupot, and an Åmot Walk at Hatdin Åmot Chamorro, Rota's very own Garden of Chamorro Medicine.

A total of 15 participants joined the walk, and the hospitality team was another six people, and this doesn't include the crowd at the opening ceremony.

Besides the Amot Walk, the group had traditional demonstrations and on-site cooking demonstrations, Egurolla said.

"It was a three-day event filled with food and great connections with each other. We were so touched by the amount of hospitality that the people of Rota [showed] us," she said. "Rota was truly so magical, the island was so welcoming."

Egurolla said the Rota walk had been their third one so far, with the first done on Saipan during the Marianas History Conference, and the second in Guam.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
CNMI GOVERNMENT

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL
RFP NO.: DPW24-RFP No.: 42400010

SUBMISSION DATE: December 27, 2023 TIME: 10:00 A.M.

"Materials Recovery and Recycling Operations"

COPIES OF THE SPECIFICATIONS MAY BE OBTAINED AT THE TECHNICAL SERVICES DIVISION, DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS, LOCATED ON SECOND FLOOR, OLEAI JOETEN COMMERCIAL CENTER, SAN JOSE, SAIPAN, DURING REGULAR WORKING HOURS.

THE PROVISIONS OF THE CNMI PROCUREMENT REGULATIONS, NMIAC SECTION 70-30.3-725 AND 70-30.3-730 PROHIBITING GRATUITIES, KICKBACKS AND CONTINGENT FEES SHALL APPLY.

The project package will be available on or after **November 23, 2023** at Technical Services Division, Department of Public Works, located on Second Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, San Jose, Saipan.

There will be a **Pre-Proposal Conference** for this project on **December 13, 2023,** 9:00 a.m. local time at the Department of Public Works Conference Room 2nd Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center Office, Saipan. The Prospective bidders are encouraged to familiarize themselves with the site. All question regarding this project must be submitted in writing no later than 4:30 p.m. local time on **December 21, 2023** to **Mr. Anthony A. Camacho, Director of Technical Services Division,** 2nd Floor, Oleai Joeten Commercial Center, Saipan or fax to (670) 234-3547. Response to questions shall be shared with prospective bidders.

THE CNMI GOVERNMENT RESERVES THE RIGHT TO REJECT ANY OR ALL BIDS, OR PORTIONS THEREOF, AND WAIVE IMMATERIAL DEFECTS IF TO DO SO WOULD BE IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CNMI GOVERNMENT.

/S/ RAY N. YUMUL
Secretary, DPW

/S/ BRIEN SERS NICHOLAS JR.
Acting Director, Division of Procurement Services

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JOB VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT # 02-2024

Opening date: November 24, 2023 Closing date: December 22, 2023

Location: SAIPAN	SALARY
Position(s): (1) Saipan Airport Manager	$70,000 (UNGRADED)
(1) Comptroller	$80,000 (UNGRADED)

Location: ROTA	SALARY
Position(s): (1) Rota Ports Manager	$55,000 (UNGRADED)

Employment Application must be accompanied with a copy of all required diploma/certificates and/or official sealed transcripts, original copy of recent police record not more than six (6) months old, original copy of U.S. Department of Defense Form DD214 for retired members or veterans of our Armed Forces, and other documents as required for the position. Public Law 11-70 requires that all male applicants age 18 to 25 years old must submit documentation evidencing his registration with the Federal Selective Service System. All applications and required documents must be submitted to the ***CPA Administration Office, 2nd Floor Arrival Building, Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport or CPA Administration Office, Tinian International Airport, or Benjamin Taisacan Manglona International Airport.*** Failure to provide any of the required documents will result in automatic disqualification. Certain vacancies may require written and/or physical test. Selected applicants will be subjected to pre-employment drug screening, 10-year Criminal History Record Check and 49 CFR Part 1542.209(d) Requirements. CPA reserves the right to waive or implement other qualifications to meet its needs. The deadline for submission of applications and required documents to the CPA Administration Office (Saipan) or at the Tinian International Airport or Benjamin Taisacan Manglona International Airport is no later than **5:00P.M. on Friday, December 22, 2023.**

Detailed information on qualifications and position descriptions for the above positions may be picked up along with the application form from Monday-Friday, 8:00 A.M. to 5:00 P.M., except on holidays, at the CPA Administration Office (2nd Floor) of the Francisco C. Ada/Saipan International Airport, Arrival Terminal or CPA Admin, Office at the Tinian International Airport or at the Benjamin Taisacan Manglona International Airport. For additional information, please contact the CPA Human Resources Office by email at lorna.robert@cnmiports.com and hrspecialist@cnmiports.com or by phone at (670)237-6500.

CPA is an Equal Opportunity Employer and CPA hires those who are legally entitled to employment in the CNMI.

LEO B. TUDELA
Executive Director

Carbullido addresses Technology Conference on Saipan

Yesterday at the opening of the Pacific Judicial Council's 2023 Technology Conference, Justice F. Philip Carbullido of the Supreme Court of Guam addressed a gathering of esteemed judges, attorneys, and distinguished guests throughout Micronesia at the Pacific Islands Club Saipan. With a theme titled "Welcome to the New Age," the conference aims to explore the intersection of law and technology in the current digital era.

In his opening remarks, Carbullido emphasized the importance of understanding, adapting, and innovating in response to the rapid technological advancements impacting the judicial system.

"As we stand on the cusp of unprecedented technological advancements, we must confront the challenges and opportunities they present to our judicial system," he said.

The conference sessions will delve into various critical topics such as the discovery and admission of Electronically Stored Information (ESI) presented by Justice Daniel Crothers of the North Dakota Supreme Court, analysis of complex Fourth Amendment issues presented by Judge Mark McGinnis of the Wisconsin Circuit Court and Chief Justice Robert Torres of the Guam Supreme Court, and the evolving definition of privacy in the digital world post the Carpenter decision. The sessions also aim to explore the implications of search warrants and their exceptions, the evidentiary value of digital evidence, and the cyber threats associated with electronic devices presented by Mark Lanterman, the Chief Technology Officer of Computer Forensic Services of Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Carbullido

Highlighting the significance of ethics in judicial investigation, Carbullido underscored the importance of understanding the rules and duties in the vast sea of information available today. The conference will also provide insights into Search Warrants in the digital sphere, compliance with the Fourth Amendment, and the legal implications of emerging tools like Geofence Warrants.

An intriguing session on the Dark Net is set to shed light on the underworld of cybercrimes. Additionally, the conference will discuss the impact of Artificial Intelligence and Bots on the judicial system, addressing the opportunities and pitfalls of these emerging technologies.

Carbullido concluded his remarks by encouraging the attendees to actively engage in the sessions, ask questions, and share their experiences. The conference represents a crucial step for the judicial community in Micronesia to stay abreast of the technological changes shaping the legal landscape.

Chief Justice Alexandro Castro also extended welcoming remarks.

For more information about the conference and its sessions, contact Petrina Ula, judicial assistant to the F. Philip Carbullido, and staff assistant of the Pacific Judicial Conference at (671) 475-3413 or pula@guamcourts.gov. ***(PR)***

Judiciary to host inaugural High School Moot Court Competition

The NMI Judiciary will be hosting the Commonwealth's first ever High School Moot Court Competition on Dec. 6-7. Eighteen high school students from across the Commonwealth have participated in a 10-week Moot Court program that will culminate in a two-day tournament at the Guma' Hustisia. The students have learned how to argue in a court of appeals by participating in workshops, drafting legal briefs, and practicing analytical skills.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Supreme Court law clerks Nathan Ford and Paige Lehman lead an exercise in statutory interpretation during a workshop for High School Moot Court competitors.

Fourth Amendment
"The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."
SUPREME COURT
CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Patrick Quimby, law clerk to Chief Justice Alexandro C. Castro, explains the Fourth Amendment of the United States Constitution during a Moot Court workshop.

Students will present arguments on behalf of their clients in the mock case *Sablan v. Anatahan High School*, in which a school official found an antique fishing spear during an unconsented search of a student's truck. Competitors must answer two legal questions: if searching the truck violated the Fourth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and if the fishing spear qualifies as a dangerous or deadly weapon.

"These outstanding students will compete before panels of justices at the Guma' Hustisia. Teams of two students will represent opposing sides. We appreciate the assistance of the CNMI Bar Association members who will serve as justices for the preliminary and semi-final rounds," said Supreme Court clerk of court Judy T. Aldan.

"In the championship round on Dec. 7, the top two teams will argue before Supreme Court Chief Justice Alexandro C. Castro, Justice John A. Mangloña, Justice Perry B. Inos, and Chief Judge Ramona V. Mangloña and Magistrate Judge Heather L. Kennedy of the United States District Court for the NMI."

The champions, finalists, and semi-finalists will receive awards recognizing their achievement.

The winning team will represent the Commonwealth at the National Association of Moot Court tournament at the University of California Santa Barbara in March 2024.

Funding for the program has been provided by the Federal Programs Office of the Public School System.

The public is invited to attend the competition on Dec. 6 and 7 beginning at 10am. The moot court case materials are available at NMIJudiciary.gov.

For more information, contact Aldan at Supreme.Court@NMIJudiciary.gov. ***(PR)***

Christmas in the Marianas kicks off at T Galleria on Dec. 2

The Marianas Visitors Authority, in collaboration with PDM Promoters, Team PDI, and DFS Saipan, will kick off the 19th Annual Christmas in The Marianas signature event with a full evening of holiday events beginning on Dec. 2, 2023.

This year's celebration will gather revelers at T Galleria in Garapan, Saipan, on four Saturdays: Dec. 2, 9, 16, and 30. Following The Marianas Experience—a free, interactive indigenous cultural exhibition—from 3pm to 5pm, holiday music will welcome revelers until the program kicks off at 5:45pm with countdown to the lighting of a giant Christmas Tree inside T Galleria. Beginning at 6pm, students of local elementary schools will sing Christmas carols representing the multi-cultural Marianas.

"From all indications, Christmas in The Marianas is going to be an extraordinary celebration again this year," said MVA managing director Christopher A. Concepcion. "We are grateful to all our partners, especially all the public and private schools that have signed up to share their holiday spirit with carols, costumes, skits, and decorated trees. I'm sure the energy is going to be through the roof at T Galleria, and we invite everyone to join us."

Caroling this Saturday will include Oleai Elementary (6pm), San Vicente Elementary (6:30pm), Saipan International School (6:45pm), Grace Christian Academy (7pm), Green Meadow School (7:15pm), Mt. Carmel School (7:30pm), Brilliant Star Montessori School (7:45pm), and William S. Reyes Elementary (8pm). The Marianas Experience will resume until closing at 9pm.

Food and drink will be on sale at the event. A display of Christmas Trees featuring natural and recycled decorations made by schoolchildren will be staged in front of DFS main entrance. The event will continue on Dec. 9, 2023, with Christmas skits and other entertainment.

Participating schools are William S. Reyes Elementary School, Hopwood Middle School, Grace Christian Academy, Golden Harvest International School, Chacha Ocean View Middle School, Green Meadow School, Tanapag Middle School, Saipan International School, Garapan Elementary School, Dandan Middle School, Northern Marianas International School, Agape Christian School, San Vicente Elementary School, Kagman Elementary School, Brilliant Star School, Mount Carmel School, Oleai Elementary School, Francisco M. Sablan Middle School, Saipan Southern High School, Marianas High School, Saipan Community School, and Koblerville Elementary School.

Christmas tree contest prizes will be awarded on Dec. 16, 2023. Caroling & Skit Contest will be awarded on Dec. 30, 2023.

MVA
Tanapag Middle School performs at the 18th Annual Christmas in The Marianas on Jan. 7, 2023, in Saipan. The annual signature event of the Marianas Visitors Authority will be held in the evenings on Dec. 2, 9, 16, and 30, 2023, at T Galleria in Garapan, Saipan.

This event is sponsored by Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan, iShop, and Fishing Tackle & Sporting Goods. Other event supporters are the CNMI Public School System and Chamolinian Cultural Village Inc.

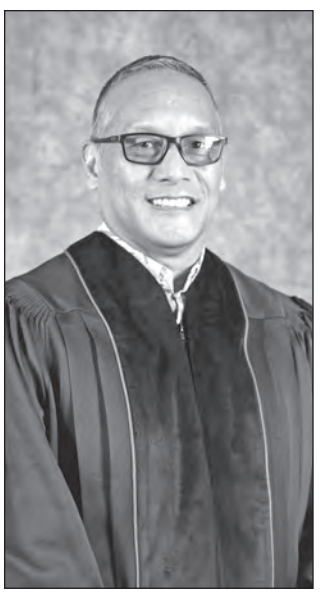
For more information, contact lead event coordinator and MVA Community Projects specialist Jack Aranda at jaranda@mymarianas.com or (670) 664-3200/1 or visit The Marianas Calendar at www.mymarianas.com. ***(MVA)***

Cepeda appointed to ACCT Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee

Northern Marianas College Board of Regents chair Charles V. Cepeda has been appointed by the Association of Community College Trustees chair Jay Nardini to serve on the ACCT Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee.

The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee ensures leadership for the involvement of historically underrepresented diverse populations within the governance activities of ACCT, which represents more than 6,500 elected and appointed trustees who govern over 1,200 community, technical, and junior colleges in the United States and beyond.

Members of the committee promote respect for and acceptance of diverse individuals and promote awareness and educational opportunity for underrepresented populations. Moreover, it advises the ACCT Board by strengthening the links with the association's minority membership, identifying issues that require member input, and recommending strategies to gather input.



NMC

Northern Marianas College Board of Regents chair Charles V. Cepeda.

By joining this committee, Cepeda expressed his commitment to contributing his knowledge and experiences in promoting diversity and equality across the nation from the perspective of Pacific Islanders.

"I am honored to be appointed by ACCT chairman Nardini to serve on this important committee, which aligns with my commitment to fostering the inclusion of the Pacific Island colleges alongside our mainland educational institutions. I look forward to collaborating with like-minded individuals who share a common vision for creating more equitable academic settings. Together, we can work towards supporting our Pacific Islanders experiencing systemic inequalities and develop an environment for all our islander students to have equal opportunities for success," said Cepeda.

NMC president Dr. Galvin Deleon Guerrero noted that Cepeda has demonstrated a personal commitment to promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives across NMC's three campuses on the islands of Saipan, Tinian, and Rota, as well as exemplifying it in advocacy with government and regional leaders.

"Chairman Cepeda has been diligent and proactive in leading board-level discussions that foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. Beyond his chairmanship duties here at home, he consistently delivers on this commitment to DEI by continuing to advocate for Asian-Pacific Islanders at the national level as a member of the ACCT Western Regional Nominating Committee and as state coordinator for the CNMI. ACCT is well-served to have him on this important committee because he will provide meaningful insight as a recognized Pacific Islander leader for the benefit of this committee's work of promoting awareness and educational opportunities for underrepresented populations at the national level," said Deleon Guerrero.

The ACCT consists of community professionals, business officials, public policy leaders, and leading citizens that offer their time and talent to serve on the governing boards of this century's most innovative higher education institutions-community, junior, and technical colleges-and make decisions that affect more than 1,200 colleges and over 11 million students annually. ***(NMC)***

Road safety for Hell of Marianas

The Hell of The Marianas century cycle will be held on Dec. 2, 2023, from 6:30am to 1pm with over 150 cyclists. To ensure the safety of participants, dog owners are reminded to leash or fence their dogs and drivers are asked to drive carefully and follow the directions of all traffic officers along the route. For a course map, visit www.hellofthemarianas.com.

One hundred twenty-two cyclists from five countries and territories have signed up to ride in the Hell of the Marianas century cycle.

The race, jointly organized by the Marianas Visitors Authority and Northern Mariana Islands Cycling Federation, attracts cyclists from around the world to take on the island's challenging terrain. Participating countries to date are South Korea, Japan, Russia, Guam, and the Marianas.

As of detailed statistics, 11 pros—all men—had signed on, including seven from Guam, three from Japan, and one from Korea. Fifty-seven men from Korea, Guam, Japan, Russia, and the Marianas will take on the men's open course of the 100K race, while 26 women from the Marianas, Korea, and Guam will take on the women's open course. On the 50K short course, eight men and six women from the Marianas have signed on, with one more men's competitor from Guam. The short course MTB race—ridden on mountain bikes—has seven challengers from the Marianas, as well. Registrants from the Marianas are all from Saipan, except for one entry to date from Tinian.

Registration is $85 for what racers have called one of the toughest cycling events in the Pacific region. Prizes will be awarded for male and female in the categories of pro/elite and age group. Participants will also receive a race T-shirt and entry to the awards banquet.

To register, visit webscorer.com and use Race ID 312625.

The Hell of the Marianas winds its way through Saipan's hills, valleys, and scenic byways. Participants must navigate 4,900 feet of ascents, including steep climbs and fast descents, making it a true test of endurance and skill. The event is open to both amateur and professional riders. The race has become an important part of Saipan's sporting and cultural scene and has helped raise awareness of the island's unique natural beauty and cultural heritage. Begun in 2007, the Hell is considered the ultimate race with professional athletes arriving from Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Russia, Australia, Guam, and elsewhere to participate.

For more information, contact NMI Cycling Federation president Vince Seman at nmicycling@gmail.com. ***(MVA)***

6 named recipients of Governor's Humanities Awards

NMHC

The 2023 Governor's Humanities Awards recipients, Ajani S. Burrell, William J. Fife, Carmen S. Taimanao, Deborah A. Fleming, Milton F. Coleman Jr., and Donald B. Mendiola pose with Gov. Arnold I. Palacios and Northern Marianas Humanities Council board members.

NMHC

Roberto Santos plays the flute during the 2023 Governor's Humanities Awards event.

NMHC

Catherine Rosario Perry served as the emcee of the event.

The Northern Marianas Humanities Council would like to announce the 2023 Governor's Humanities Awards recipients.

Each year, as part of CNMI Humanities Month in October, the Humanities Council partners with the CNMI Office of the Governor to recognize outstanding contributions to the humanities by individuals and organizations in the community across six award categories. Awardees are selected based on nominations submitted by members of the community.

This year's recipients are:

■ Ajani S. Burrell: For Research and Publication in the Humanities

Burrell was recognized for his editorial work and contribution of essays and articles to the book, "Marianas Mosaic: Signs and Shifts in Contemporary Island Life."

■ William J. Fife, III: For Outstanding Humanities Teacher in a classroom setting

Fife was recognized for his impactful teaching methods and for connecting students to the importance of their cultural identities.

■ Carmen S. Taimanao: For Outstanding Humanities Teacher in a non-classroom setting

Taimanao was recognized for her efforts to promote Chamorro language and culture by translating and writing an array of books in Chamorro that is used in the Chamorro and Carolinian Language and Heritage Studies and Motheread/Fatheread CNMI programs.

■ Deborah A. Fleming: For Preservation of CNMI History

Fleming was recognized for her role as a cultural advisor and historian on various archeological, infrastructure, and humanities projects on Tinian.

■ Milton F. Coleman Jr.: For Preservation of Traditional Cultural Practices

Coleman was recognized for building various styles of sailing and voyaging canoes and sharing his knowledge and passion for cultural seafaring traditions throughout the Pacific.

■ Donald B. Mendiola: For a Lifetime of Achievement in the Humanities

Mendiola was recognized for dedicating 50 years of practice in medicinal healing and for enriching the community with his knowledge of language and culture.

For more information about each awardee's contributions to the humanities and photos of the 2023 Governor's Humanities Awards reception on Oct. 17, 2023, visit www.nmhcouncil.org/GHA2023. ***(PR)***

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
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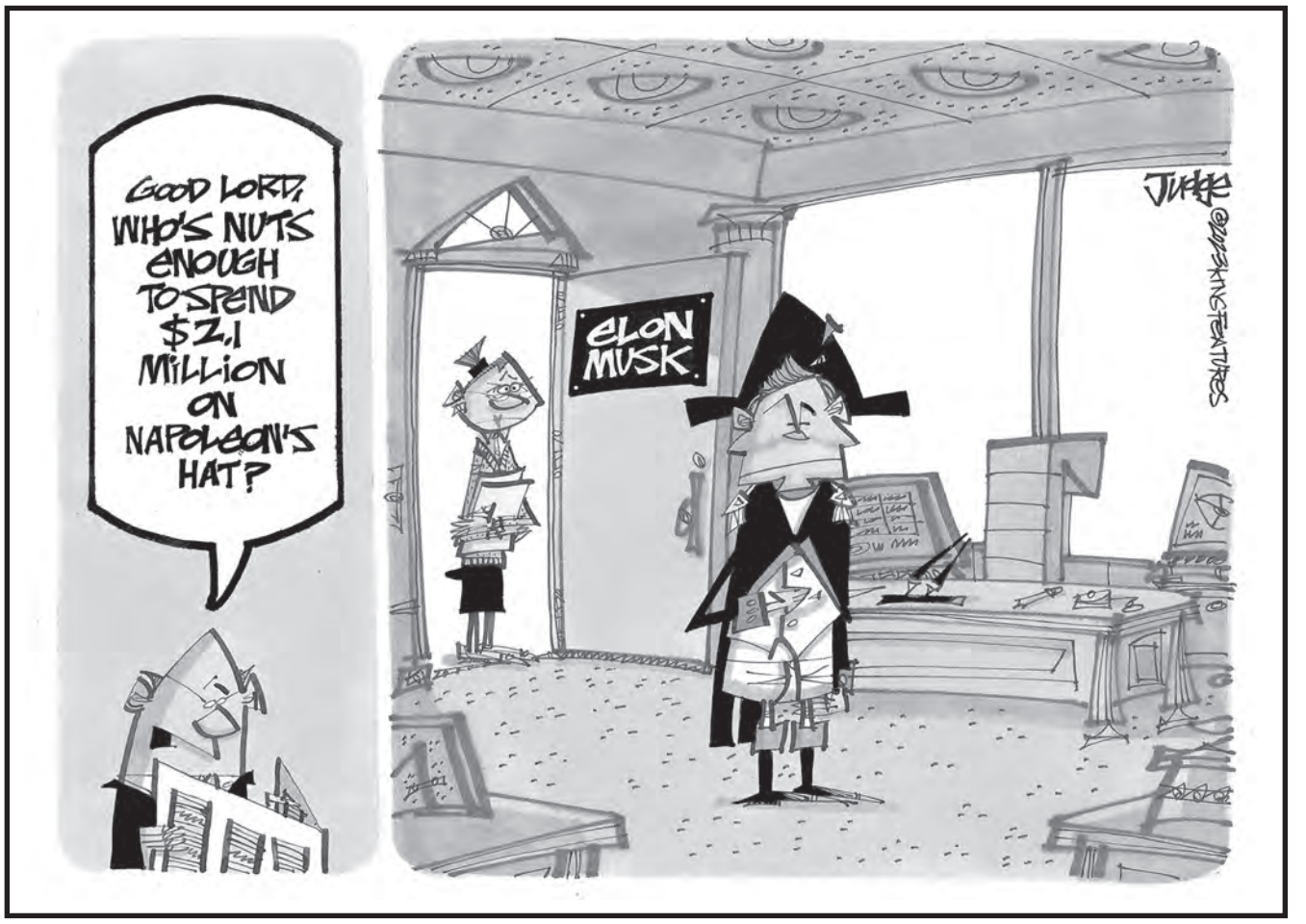

EDITORIAL

The Right against rights: Far-right victories should concern us all

A shock result in Dutch elections handed the largest number of the country's parliamentary seats to the party of extreme right, isolationist, anti-immigrant and Islamophobic longtime political gadfly Geert Wilders last week. He vowed that the country would be "returned to the Dutch."

Wilders might be a relative unknown to most Americans, but he's certainly a known quantity among those who've tracked and studied the rise of the global far-right. The virulent xenophobe and Euro-skeptic was something of a template for a new class of new authoritarian, less polished and martial than those who came before, with a focus on immigration and a knack for connecting with and radicalizing online right-wing communities, complete with weird hair and some kind of private-sector background.

Wilders is sometimes called the Dutch Trump, but the reality is he was Trump before Trump was. He's been a parliamentarian since 1998, and founded his Party for Freedom in 2006. His rhetoric and positions have changed little over the years. He's not a fresh-faced populist who came out of nowhere to pull the wool over the electorate's eyes; people knew what he was about.

Many observers dismissed the possibility that Wilders would ever wield real power. What has changed is the electorate, which around the world has become increasingly tolerant or even supportive of far-right political movements.

Less than a week prior to the Dutch elections, the far-right libertarian Javier Milei swept to decisive victory in the Argentine presidential election. Amid a faltering economy, the economist and onetime TV pundit—beloved by bookers for his ratings-boosting railing against the government—promised, essentially, to burn it all down, dissolving the central bank, ditching the currency and engaging in a program of massive spending cuts.

Many Argentines openly acknowledged that they had no idea how this was all going to pan out, but they just wanted change, and Milei was going to deliver it.

The same desire for someone to come in and fix everything, to stick it to the political system, is what led voters to opt for Giorgia Meloni's far-right government in Italy last year and to give the far-right Finns Party a sizable chunk of the Finnish governing coalition.

It is what is leading the mainstream GOP, with the support of the majority of Republican voters, to coalesce around Donald Trump despite his contempt for American democracy and effort to overthrow it, his plans to weaponize the levers of government to his advantage and, crucially, his total failure to actually bring safety or prosperity to the American public.

It is perhaps this latter point that's most infuriating, as all the evidence to the contrary rarely convinces people that these far-right movements won't deliver what they promise. They prey on dissatisfaction with a changing world and a seemingly indifferent elite, and not every one of their critiques and grievances are manufactured; things like stagnant wages, unresponsive bu-

See RIGHT on Page 9

It's past time scientists admitted their COVID mistakes

By F.D. FLAM
Bloomberg Opinion

F.D. Flam is a Bloomberg Opinion *columnist covering science. She is host of the* Follow the Science *podcast.*

During the pandemic years, Americans' trust in scientists fell, according to a Pew poll released this month. In 2019, only 13% of Americans were distrustful enough to say they weren't confident in scientists to act in the public's best interest. Now that figure is 27%—despite recent triumphs in astronomy, cancer research, genetics and other fields.

It's reasonable to assume the problem stems from COVID-era public health missteps. Some public health agencies took years to admit what had quickly become obvious: that the virus was airborne. Others suggested precautions, closing playgrounds and beaches, where any benefit would have been minimal. Some promoted policies, like sustained social isolation, that were hard to implement and endure—even for the prominent epidemiologists promoting them.

Public health researchers and officials seem to think that rebuilding trust is just a matter of clearer, more persuasive communication. That would help, but it's not enough—they should admit to their mistakes.

There's been reluctance to do so. Last week, I attended an international meeting at Boston University on pandemic preparedness, and a panel on communication never got into the mistakes of the pandemic. When I asked experts afterwards about various policies and declarations that look wrong in retrospect, I got a chorus of "We didn't know"—an unsatisfying answer. Even at the time, scientists should have been clearer when they were basing policies on educated guesses.

Sandro Galea, dean of public health at Boston University, delves deep into what public health got wrong in his new book, "Within Reason: A Liberal Public Health For an Illiberal Time," to be published Dec. 1.

He tackles the silencing of dissenting opinions which led to groupthink, and the encroachment of political and personal opinions into the arena of science. That led to policies that were not always within reason—restrictions on outdoor behavior, closed playgrounds and prolonged school closings.

In an interview, Galea told me that the reluctance to talk about such mistakes comes from a place of insecurity—a fear of giving in to the other side, equated here with former President Donald Trump. Public health officials were rightfully dismayed by Trump's unreliable bombast. But the answer isn't to pretend to be infallible.

Even as early as January and February of 2020, the US public health community was making unforced errors. Evidence mounted week after week that this disease was wreaking havoc in China and spreading around the world. Health authorities should have been scrambling to prepare hospitals and nursing homes, to create tests that worked, and to develop a strategy for contact tracing and virus monitoring. They should have warned people of possible business and school closures ahead.

Instead, we got reassurance from public health officials, including editorials claiming that seasonal flu was a worse threat.

New York's major outbreak in March 2020 created the conditions for a U-turn. As people died despite the lockdowns, we got moralizing about the dangers of going outside, despite reasonable evidence that was not the problem.

Perhaps it's misguided to expect people to trust scientists when trust in so many institutions has fallen. (Scientists are still more trusted than journalists.) And yet science works because the methods of science were developed to smooth out the work of fallible humans into a body of reliable, useful knowledge.

The double-blind clinical trial is an ingenious antidote to bias and our human tendency to see what we want rather than what's really there. That's why I got the COVID vaccine—not because I uncritically trust Anthony Fauci.

The same level of evidence didn't support the implementation of vaccine mandates, and some institutions went beyond reasonable evidence in forcing workers and students at very low risk of severe disease to get second and third booster shots.

This public health excess fed into existing pockets of irrational paranoia, giving new power to gurus on YouTube, who proclaim that they government is covering up deadly vaccine side effects—as well as the "real" cure for COVID, UFO aliens and plots to take away everyone's property.

Some of those spouting conspiracy theories are scientists—or at least people with the right degrees—which points to a flaw in the idea that people should trust the whole profession. Historian Edward Tenner calls them alt-thorities, and they show up not just on YouTube but Fox News and the popular Joe Rogan show.

So maybe the best we can hope for is more trust in scientists who appeal to that great body of established knowledge, and who present new knowledge when bolstered with multiple lines of evidence. And we should trust them not necessarily to act in the public interest, but to act in the pursuit of truth.

EDITORIAL POLICY Letters to the editor must include the NAME, VILLAGE ADDRESS, and CONTACT NUMBER of the contributor. Letters that do not have these information will immediately be trashed. Contributions consisting of 500 words or less have more chances of getting published. The *Saipan Tribune* reserves the right to publish a contribution or not; the right to edit submissions for length, accuracy, and clarity; and the right to publish and distribute contributions in print, electronic, or other media formats. Submissions may be sent via snail mail to the 2nd Floor, JP Center, Beach Road, Garapan, Saipan, 96950; fax (670) 235-3740; e-mail to editor@saipantribune.com; or through our website at www.saipantribune.com.

Making Tourism Our Business: Building bicycle tourism

By CHRISTOPHER A. CONCEPCION
Special to the Saipan Tribune

Christopher A. Concepcion is managing director of the Marianas Visitors Authority.

"Investing in bicycle tourism has the potential to be a major win-win for both visitors and our local community. …(It) enhances our destination and home by facilitating a sustainable form of tourism that contributes to better community health and related savings, less congestion, environmental health, and—by many accounts—happier people."

This Saturday—Dec. 2—over 150 cyclists from Asia, Europe, and the region will take to Saipan roads in a race that has been hailed as one the toughest of the Pacific—the Hell of The Marianas. Competitors, both pros and amateurs, are arriving from South Korea, Japan, Russia, the United States, and Guam to ride side-by-side with our homegrown Marianas cyclists through the roads of Saipan.

Participants must navigate 4,900 feet of ascents, including steep climbs and fast descents, making it a true test of endurance and skill. Beginning at 6:15am at the former Mariana Resort & Spa, cyclists will travel south on Beach Road to Koblerville, proceed to Kagman, Capitol Hill, and Talofofo, and then down Capitol Hill to As Matuis and Marpi, finishing in the early afternoon. The event is organized by the Marianas Visitors Authority and Northern Mariana Islands Cycling Federation.

Sports tourism has been one of the niche markets of The Marianas for decades. Our year-round tropical weather and natural beauty are perfect for attracting all types of sportspeople. Registration is gaining momentum as the MVA prepares to inaugurate the first ever Rota Marathon on Jan. 13 (Martin Luther King Jr. Day weekend) with a full, half, and 5K courses. And registration is also racking up for Saipan Marathon 2024 on March 9. Of course, divers, golfers, and other sports enthusiasts arrive year-round.

This weekend's Hell of The Marianas gives us an opportunity to consider the potential—and need—for bicycle tourism in our destination. What is bicycle tourism, you ask? The Path Less Pedaled defines it as "any travel related activity for the purpose of pleasure which incorporates a bicycle." Cycling events like Hell of The Marianas qualify, as well as riding around a particular destination or attraction, like the rides being offered in Marpi. This could be expanded to include day rides and urban cycling such as bike shares that would allow visitors to get from one village to the next or even take a bike tour of our Garapan Heritage Trail. Another good example of bicycle tourism are the cyclists who travel to Tinian for the annual Pika Bike Race and spend the rest of their time leisurely biking around the rest of the island, spending money at restaurants, hotels, stores, and other establishments.

Investing in bicycle tourism has the potential to be a major win-win for both visitors and our local community. The construction of bike lanes on our new roads—including the newly opened Route 36 in the scenic northeast of Saipan and the anticipated bike lanes on the new Beach Road and Garapan Revitalization Project under construction—enhances our destination and home by facilitating a sustainable form of tourism that contributes to better community health and related savings, less congestion, environmental health, and—by many accounts—happier people.

Bike lanes and bike paths, bike parking, and bike shares are the path to growing bicycle tourism. Some cities have even reduced speed limits for the safety of motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians alike. And, of course, more education for both drivers and cyclists is required. For motorists, that means staying at least three feet away from cyclists and sharing the road. For cyclists, that includes abiding by all traffic signs and lights, notifying your presence when approaching or passing people, walking your bike on non-bicycle paths, and others.

With a few key investments—monetary and otherwise—we can build a bicycle-friendly community: more bicycle network mileage, more bike facilities, bicycle education in schools, a share of transportation budget spent on bicycling, bicycle-friendly laws and ordinances, and more.

Saturday's Hell of The Marianas is an opportunity to demonstrate to our visitors that Saipan is a safe and enjoyable place to cycle. If you're driving on the race route, please do so safely. Owners, please ensure your dogs are leashed to prevent accidents. And we invite the entire community to cheer for racers when they pass your house or business. You can find the full race map at www.mymarianas.com/the-marianas-calendar.

We look forward to continuing to grow Hell of The Marianas in the coming years, and we envision more opportunities to grow bicycle tourism throughout the islands, as well.

Today's 'violent' Congress would make Civil War-era lawmakers laugh

By STEPHEN MIHM
Bloomberg Opinion

Stephen Mihm, a professor of history at the University of Georgia, is coauthor of Crisis Economics: A Crash Course in the Future of Finance.

Congressional dysfunction took a dangerous turn this month. In the House, former Speaker Kevin McCarthy allegedly elbowed Representative Tim Burchett in the kidney (McCarthy denied the claim). Not to be outdone, Senator Markwayne Mullin challenged the president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters union, Sean O'Brien, to a fight, with the two men exchanging insults.

For those inclined to believe that these childish provocations auger the end of the republic, please consider life in Congress in the decades before the Civil War. If the politicians of that era could be magically transported to our own Congress, they would likely roll their eyes—thinking that today's antics are child's play—and say: "hold my beer."

When Congress first met in 1789, political parties didn't yet exist. That changed quickly, and by the decade's end, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans were at each other's throats—literally. In 1798, Representative Matthew Lyon of Vermont, a Democratic-Republican, said something nasty about Representative Roger Griswold of Connecticut, a Federalist.

Griswold called Lyon a coward in front of the other legislators. Lyon promptly spit in Griswold's face. At this point, Griswold got hold of a hickory walking stick and beat Lyon 20-plus times. As Lyon ran from his attacker, he managed to pick up a pair of fire tongs and hit back. The melee would continue for some time before the audience pulled the men apart.

Such was toxic masculinity in the new nation. The historian Joanne Freeman, who has written two books examining how political partisanship in this era often turned violent, describes these clashes as "ritualistic affairs of honor" where men would ratchet up provocations in a predictable, if dangerous, fashion.

Typically, disputes would begin with insults and counter-insults that make our own era's taunts look pretty tame by comparison. Instead of calling someone a "Smurf," as one legislator did recently, politicians of the early republic favored old-school insults: "coward," "liar," "rascal," "scoundrel," and most delicious of all, "puppy."

As Freeman notes, these insults "demanded an immediate challenge, for they struck at the core elements of manliness and gentility." Once someone resorted to these fighting words, it was pretty easy for the conflict to turn physical. A surefire way to escalate: grab your opponent's nose and twist it. "Nose-tweaking" was tantamount to challenging someone to a duel, but even nasty insults published in newspapers could lead to deadly encounters, as Alexander Hamilton could posthumously attest.

These disputes, whether fatal or not, could arise from all manner of misunderstandings and rivalries, many of them quite trivial. The same cannot be said of the violent battles over slavery that consumed Congress from the 1830s through the start of the Civil War. During these decades, particularly the 1850s, the desire to defend one's political honor converged with what was—and remains—the most divisive, powerful political issue in the nation's history.

In her research, Freeman has uncovered upward of 70 different violent altercations between members of Congress during this time, either in the Capitol building or in and around it. These incidents almost invariably pitted Northerners and Southerners against one another, with slavery the principal source of disagreement.

Southern politicians increasingly turned to violent threats to advance their agenda of protecting and expanding slavery. For example, when Congress debated the vexed legislation that would become known as the Compromise of 1850, Representative Thomas Clingman and Senator Henry Foote, both of Mississippi, announced that they and their allies would bring guns into Congress and open fire if they didn't get their way.

For the remainder of the decade, many in Congress took to carrying guns and knives, even ostentatiously displaying the weapons to deter would-be attackers. Disputes often erupted into outright violence, most famously when Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner made a speech calling South Carolina Senator Andrew Butler a "noise-some, squat, nameless animal" who consorted with a metaphorical mistress: "the harlot, Slavery."

The insult provoked Representative Preston Brooks, a relative of Butler's, to ambush Sumner as he answered mail at his desk. Armed with a metal-tipped cane used to discipline dogs, Brooks beat Sumner senseless, leaving him semi-conscious in a pool of his own blood. Henry Wilson, the other senator from Massachusetts, called the attack "brutal, murderous, and cowardly," provoking Brooks to challenge Wilson to a duel. (Wilson, no shrinking violet, disdainfully declined.)

Other melees erupted over far less but almost always traced their origins to disputes over slavery. In 1858, for example, another South Carolinian, Representative Laurence Keitt, made the mistake of getting a little too close to Pennsylvania Republican Galusha Grow in a heated argument over an out-of-order motion. Grow punched Keitt, inaugurating an epic brawl that culminated in 50-plus lawmakers throwing tobacco spittoons at one another. Just another day at the office.

In hindsight, these incidents read like harbingers of the violence of the Civil War. The same, though, cannot be said of the bad behavior on display recently. There's no single lightning-rod issue driving the division, and it's not even clear that this reflects actual conflict between political parties.

Still, if the coming weeks bring news that Chuck Schumer grabbed Mitch McConnell's nose and called him a puppy, be afraid. Be very afraid.

RIGHT

From page 8

reaucracies and the encroaching power of tech and corporate consolidation are real issues.

Yet their solutions—to blame and go after immigrants, cut government functions, vilify LGBTQ people and return to some imagined more moral past—are no solutions at all. The antidote to their venom must be an informed citizenry that can reject the snake oil. It can't come soon enough.

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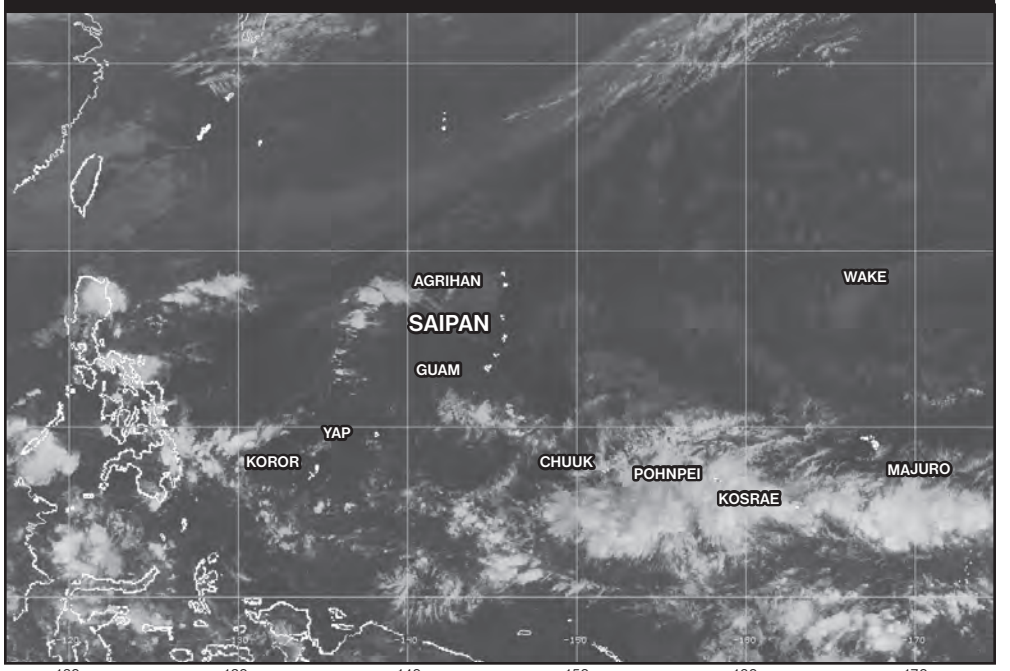
The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY	MONDAY
Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 10 to 20 mph.	Partly cloudy with isolated showers. East winds 15 to 20 mph.	Mostly cloudy. Scattered showers.	Partly sunny with a 30 percent chance of showers.	Partly cloudy with a 20 percent chance of showers.
87 / 78°	87 / 78°	87 / 78°	87 / 78°	87 / 78°

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 10:50 AM, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2023

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

Last night was the last shift and issuance of the Area Forecast Discussion (AFD) by Michael Ziobro, senior forecaster. Mike has retired after more than 25 years serving the people of the Marianas and Micronesia. Thank you for your service. It was a privilege working with you. We wish you a happy retirement.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: https://www.weather.gov/gum/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Thunderstorms	88° / 80°
Palau	Thunderstorms	86° / 78°
Yap	Thunderstorms	86° / 80°
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	88° / 79°
Pohnpei	Partly Sunny	88° / 78°
Kosrae	Thunderstorms	84° / 81°
Majuro	Partly Sunny	86° / 82°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:26 AM	5:44 PM
Friday	6:26 AM	5:44 PM
Saturday	6:27 AM	5:44 PM
Sunday	6:27 AM	5:45 PM
Monday	6:28 AM	5:45 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	8:54 AM	8:14 PM
Friday	-	9:46 AM	9:10 PM
Saturday	-	10:34 AM	10:03 PM
Sunday	-	11:16 AM	10:54 PM
Monday	-	11:54 AM	11:42 PM

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Partly Sunny	66° / 56°
Beijing	Partly Sunny	38° / 23°
Hong Kong	Fair	72° / 68°
Honolulu	Partly Cloudy	79° / 69°
London	Cloudy	45° / 37°
Los Angeles	Clear	71° / 51°
Manila	Mostly Cloudy	91° / 78°
Melbourne	Rain	74° / 63°
Miami	Partly Cloudy	75° / 63°
New York	Partly Cloudy	39° / 32°
Osaka	Mostly Cloudy	61° / 45°
Paris	Cloudy	46° / 36°
Busan	Partly Cloudy	53° / 36°
Rome	Clear	62° / 41°
Salem	Clear	55° / 37°
San Francisco	Partly Cloudy	63° / 46°
Seoul	Cloudy	38° / 23°
Tokyo	Fair	71° / 46°
Washington, DC	Clear	38° / 26°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
03:21 AM	Low Tide	-0.60
10:48 AM	High Tide	1.70
4:08 PM	Low Tide	1.19
8:16 PM	High Tide	1.60

NEWS DESK For news tips, corrections and requests for news coverage, call (670) 235-NEWS (6397), 235-2440, fax 235,3740. E-mail: editor@saipantribune.com. Website:www.saipantribune.com.

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF OCTOBER 30, 2023

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA076	9:50AM	10:30AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	5:55AM	7:55AM	Daily
UA193	7:50PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	7:55PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

7C3403/2305	4:40AM	10:20PM	Daily
UA076/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA076/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

TW308	2:15AM	6:10AM	Daily
7C3403	4:40AM	8:35AM	Daily
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:45AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

UA189	00:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6
PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	00:40AM	8:45AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:45AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
7C2306/3406	11:15PM	3:30PM+1	Daily

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily
TW307	7:45PM	1:15AM+1	Daily
7C3404	10:15PM	3:35AM+1	Daily

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF OCTOBER 30, 2023

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	SAIPAN	ROTA	08:30	09:00	Oct 21-31, 2023
1302	SAIPAN	ROTA	10:30	11:00	Daily
1303	SAIPAN	ROTA	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	ROTA	SAIPAN	9:30	10:00	Oct 21-31, 2023
3102	ROTA	SAIPAN	11:30	12:00	Saturday & Sunday
3103	ROTA	SAIPAN	13:30	14:00	Monday To Friday
3104	ROTA	SAIPAN	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	ROTA	GUAM	11:30	12:00	Monday To Friday

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	GUAM	ROTA	12:30	13:00	Monday To Friday

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1201	SAIPAN	TINIAN	7:30	7:45	Daily
1202	SAIPAN	TINIAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	SAIPAN	TINIAN	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	SAIPAN	TINIAN	10:00	10:15	Daily
1206	SAIPAN	TINIAN	15:00	15:15	Daily
1207	SAIPAN	TINIAN	16:00	16:15	Daily
1208	SAIPAN	TINIAN	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	FROM	TO	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2101	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:00	8:15	Daily
2102	TINIAN	SAIPAN	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	TINIAN	SAIPAN	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	TINIAN	SAIPAN	10:30	10:45	Daily
2106	TINIAN	SAIPAN	15:30	15:45	Daily
2107	TINIAN	SAIPAN	16:30	16:45	Daily
2108	TINIAN	SAIPAN	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

FOR 10 WEEKS STRAIGHT

US gas prices fell or remained steady

AP

In this photo made with a long exposure, vehicles move along Interstate 76 ahead of the Thanksgiving Day holiday in Philadelphia, Nov. 22, 2023.

NEW YORK (AP),It's not just you. Across the U.S., prices at the pump have felt milder in recent months.

Gas prices have fallen or remained steady since Sep. 19—marking about a 70-day trajectory of decline, Andrew Gross, spokesperson for motor club AAA, said Tuesday.

As of Tuesday, the national average for gas prices stood just below $3.25, according to AAA. That's down 25 cents from a month ago and 30 cents less than this time last year. Experts point to a recent decline in oil prices and a seasonal dip in demand, as well as easing inflation.

Each penny decline in the national average saves motorists close to $3.8 million, according to Patrick De Haan, head of petroleum analysis at GasBuddy. "If you amplify that times 30 cents, we're talking about Americans that are spending hundreds of millions less on gasoline today than they were a year ago."

Despite the drop, the global energy market can be volatile and lower gas prices down the road aren't promised. Here's what you need to know.

WHY ARE GAS PRICES FALLING?

A few factors contribute to today's gas prices, but a big explanation behind the decline is seasonality. In other words, prices at the pump almost always ease at this time of year.

For starters, there's a switch to winter blend gasoline—which is cheaper to produce than the summer blend, Gross notes. And, despite some upticks around the holidays, shorter days make hitting the road less enticing in the colder months.

"It's dark and the weather is kind of crummy, and people just want to stay home," Gross said. "Demand is a lot less (in the) fall and winter."

On top of the seasonal cycle, inflation, while down from last year, is still high and continues to undercut Americans' spending habits—which could also be contributing to today's lower demand, De Haan added.

Beyond demand, experts also point to declining oil costs. Prices at the pump are highly dependent on crude oil, which is the main ingredient in gasoline. West Texas Intermediate crude, the U.S. benchmark, has stayed in the high-to-mid $70s for the past three weeks — standing at about $76 a barrel as of Tuesday afternoon, down from over $82 a month ago.

Oil is a global commodity, so events impacting production and supply such as the Russia-Ukraine war can be felt domestically. There's also been a notable uptick in U.S. production that is "helping to keep a lid on prices" today, De Haan said.

Conservative attack on government regulation reaches Supreme Court

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Supreme Court is hearing arguments in a challenge to the Securities and Exchange Commission's ability to fight fraud, part of a broad attack on regulatory agencies led by conservative and business interests.

The case before the justices Wednesday involves the Biden administration's appeal of a lower-court ruling that threw out stiff financial penalties imposed on hedge fund manager George R. Jarkesy by the SEC.

The high court's decision could have far-reaching effects on the SEC and other regulatory agencies, and it's just one of several cases this term that could constrict federal regulators. The court's conservative majority has already reined them in, including in last May's decision sharply limiting its ability to police water pollution in wetlands.

Last year, a divided panel of the New Orleans-based 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in favor of Jarkesy and his Patriot28 investment adviser group on three separate issues.

It found that the SEC's case against him, resulting in a $300,000 civil fine and the repayment of $680,000 in allegedly ill-gotten gains, should have been heard in a federal court instead of before one of the SEC's administrative law judges.

The panel also said Congress unconstitutionally granted the SEC "unfettered authority" to decide whether the case should be tried in a court of law or handled within the executive branch agency. And it said laws shielding the commission's administrative law judges from being fired by the president are unconstitutional.

Judge Jennifer Walker Elrod wrote the appellate opinion, joined by Judge Andrew Oldham. Elrod was appointed by former President George W. Bush, and Oldham by former President Donald Trump.

Judge Eugene Davis, a nominee of former President Ronald Reagan, dissented.

Jarkesy's lawyers noted that the SEC wins almost all the cases it brings in front of the administrative law judges but only about 60% of cases tried in federal court.

The SEC was awarded more than $4 billion in civil penalties in the 2022 government spending year, the Justice Department wrote in court papers.

A decision upholding the 5th Circuit's ruling could sweep far more broadly, calling into question the authority of administrative law judges at numerous federal agencies, the Justice Department said.

A decision in SEC v. Jarkesy, 22-859, is expected by early summer.

Nation

US life expectancy rose last year

NEW YORK (AP)—U.S. life expectancy rose last year—by more than a year—but still isn't close to what it was before the COVID-19 pandemic.

» But it remains below its pre-pandemic level

The 2022 rise was mainly due to the waning pandemic, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention researchers said Wednesday. But even with the large increase, U.S. life expectancy is only back to 77 years, 6 months—about what it was two decades ago.

Life expectancy is an estimate of the average number of years a baby born in a given year might expect to live, assuming the death rates at that time hold constant. The snapshot statistic is considered one of the most important measures of the health of the U.S. population. The 2022 calculations released Wednesday are provisional, and could change a little as the math is finalized.

For decades, U.S. life expectancy rose a little nearly every year. But about a decade ago, the trend flattened and even declined some years—a stall blamed largely on overdose deaths and suicides.

Then came the coronavirus, which has killed more than 1.1 million people in the U.S. since early 2020. The measure of American longevity plunged, dropping from 78 years, 10 months in 2019 to 77 years in 2020, and then to 76 years, 5 months in 2021.

"We basically have lost 20 years of gains," said the CDC's Elizabeth Arias.

A decline in COVID-19 deaths drove 2022's improvement.

In 2021, COVID was the nation's third leading cause of death (after heart disease and cancer). Last year, it fell to the fourth leading cause. With more than a month left in the current year, preliminary data suggests COVID-19 could end up being the ninth or 10th leading cause of death in 2023.

But the U.S. is battling other issues, including drug overdose deaths and suicides.

The number of U.S. suicides reached an all-time high last year, and the national suicide rate was the highest seen since 1941, according to a second CDC report released Wednesday.

Drug overdose deaths in the U.S. went up slightly last year after two big leaps at the beginning of the pandemic. And through the first six months of this year, the estimated overdose death toll continued to inch up.

U.S. life expectancy also continues to be lower than that of dozens of other countries. It also didn't rebound as quickly as it did in other places, including France, Italy, Spain and Sweden.

Steven Woolf, a mortality researcher at Virginia Commonwealth University, said he expects the U.S. to eventually get back to the pre-pandemic life expectancy.

But "what I'm trying to say is: That is not a great place to be," he added.

Some other highlights from the new report:

■ Life expectancy increased for both men and women, and for every racial and ethnic group.

■ The decline in COVID-19 deaths drove 84% of the increase in life expectancy. The next largest contributor was a decline in heart disease deaths, credited with about 4% of the increase. But experts note that heart disease deaths increased during COVID-19, and both factored into many pandemic-era deaths.

■ Changes in life expectancy varied by race and ethnicity. Hispanic Americans and American Indians and Alaska Natives saw life expectancy rise more than two years in 2022. Black life expectancy rose more than 1 1/2 years. Asian American life expectancy rose one year and white life expectancy rose about 10 months.

But the changes are relative, because Hispanic Americans and Native Americans were hit harder at the beginning of COVID-19. Hispanic life expectancy dropped more than four years between 2019 and 2021, and Native American life expectancy fell more than six years.

Trump embraces Jan. 6 rioters on campaign trail

WASHINGTON (AP)—Donald Trump has embraced the rioters who attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021 as patriots, vowed to pardon a large portion of them if he wins a second term and even collaborated on a song with a group of jailed defendants.

In his election interference case in Washington, his lawyers are taking a different tack.

Despite losing a bid to strike from the indictment references to that day's violence, defense attorneys have made clear their strategy involves distancing the former president from the horde of rioters, whom they describe as "independent actors at the Capitol." At the same time, special counsel Jack Smith's team has signaled it will make the case that Trump is responsible for the chaos that unfolded, and point to Trump's continued support of the Jan. 6 defendants to help establish his criminal intent.

The competing arguments highlight the extent to which the riot serves as an inescapable backdrop in a landmark trial set to begin on March 4 in a courthouse just blocks away from the Capitol.

It also reflects a point of separation between Trump and his legal team in the case accusing the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination of conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss. While Trump's glorification of Jan. 6 defendants may boost him politically as he vies to retake the White House in 2024, his lawyers' approach lays bare a concern that arguments linking him to the rioters could harm him in front of a jury.

Though Trump is not charged with inciting the riot, any success he hopes to have at trial may turn in part on his defense team's ability to neutralize, or at least minimize, the ghoulish images of the violence that prosecutors cite as a natural extension of the former president's repeated lies about a stolen election.

Much may depend as well on the evidence permitted by U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan. Trump's lawyers have signaled they will try to block prosecutors from presenting at trial evidence related to the actions of the rioters, who shattered windows, beat police officers, and sent lawmakers running into hiding.

"What's likely to happen here is for the judge to strike some type of reasonable balance, which will allow prosecutors to admit some portion of the evidence about the conduct and some of the violence that went on during that day, but will put some kinds of limits on just how far prosecutors can go in presenting evidence of violent conduct," said Robert Mintz, a defense attorney and former federal prosecutor in New Jersey who has followed the case.

Asia

PH gov't, rebels agree to resume peace talks

COPENHAGEN, Denmark (AP)—The Philippine government and the country's communist rebels have agreed to resume talks aimed at ending decades of armed conflict, one of Asia's longest, Norwegian mediators announced Tuesday.

High-ranking delegations from both sides met in the Norwegian capital of Oslo last week and agreed to a "common vision for peace" that sought to address key obstacles, according to Norway's foreign ministry.

Norwegian Foreign Minister Espen Barth Eide said the deal was signed at "an important signing ceremony" on Thursday but was only made public on Tuesday.

Since 1969, the Communist Party of the Philippines and its armed wing, the New People's Army, have fought successive Philippine governments. The rebellion, which opposes the Philippines' close ties with the United States and wants left-wing parties to be part of the government, has left about 40,000 combatants and civilians dead.

The fighting has also stunted economic development in the impoverished countryside. The military says a few thousand Maoist insurgents continue to wage the insurgency to this day.

Past administrations had engaged in intermittent peace negotiations with the rebels. Former President Rodrigo Duterte ended peace talks in March 2019, accusing the rebels of attacks on police and military outposts. The U.S., the European Union and the Philippine government consider the New People's Army a terrorist organization because of its attacks targeting civilians.

Last year, Ferdinand Marcos Jr. took office as the new president and appeared more open to peace talks. He granted amnesty last week to several former rebels, including those from NPA, for offenses including rebellion, sedition and illegal assembly, but not those suspected of kidnapping, killing, terrorism or similar serious crimes.

Marcos' namesake father declared martial law in the Philippines in 1972, imprisoning thousands of suspected rebels and communist supporters, until he was ousted in a 1986 popular uprising.

The Philippine government and the National Democratic Front of the Philippines, the umbrella group representing the rebels, said in their joint statement that they "recognize the need to unite as a nation in order to urgently address these challenges and resolve the reasons for the armed conflict."

They "agree to a principled and peaceful resolution of the armed conflict."

"We envision and look forward to a country where a united people can live in peace and prosperity," the statement said. The text was the result of several informal discussions between the sides held in the Netherlands and Norway since the beginning of 2022.

"I was happy to hear the parties' decision to finally end the more than 50-year-long conflict in the Philippines," said Barth Eide, who witnessed the signing. He said that "extensive work" remained and that Norway "looks forward to continuing to assist the parties towards a final peace agreement."

Rebel negotiator Julieta De Lima did not say when formal talks will start. She said issues to be addressed include the detention of rebel "peace consultants," safety guarantees and immunity from arrest for negotiators, release of what the rebels refer to as political prisoners, and the removal of the terrorist designation for the communist movement.

The previous rounds of talks had collapsed over such demands.

41 rescued workers emerge dazed, smiling

UTTARKASHI, India (AP)—Forty-one construction workers emerged dazed and smiling late Tuesday from a collapsed tunnel where they had been stranded the last 17 days—a happy ending to an ordeal that had gripped India and involved a massive rescue operation that overcame several setbacks.

Locals, relatives and government officials erupted in joy, set off firecrackers and shouted "Bharat Mata ki Jai"—Hindi for "Long live mother India"—as happy workers walked out after receiving a brief checkup by doctors. Officials hung garlands around their necks as the crowd cheered.

Nitin Gadkari, the country's minister of road transport and highways, said in a video posted on the social media platform X that he was "completely relieved and happy" that all of the workers were rescued from the Silkyara Tunnel in Uttarkashi, a town in India's northern state of Uttarakhand.

"This was a well-coordinated effort by multiple agencies, marking one of the most significant rescue operations in recent years," Gadkari said.

No one was seriously injured or killed when a landslide caused a section of the 4.5-kilometer (2.8-mile) tunnel about 200 meters (220 yards) from the entrance to collapse early on the morning of Nov. 12. The workers were finishing their shifts and many were likely looking forward to celebrating Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, that day.

The workers had light in the collapsed tunnel, and since early in their ordeal, they were provided with food, water and oxygen through pipes. More than a dozen doctors, including psychiatrists, were also at the site monitoring their health.

Officials said all 41 workers made it through the ordeal in good health. Before emerging to the cameras and crowds and being whisked away in ambulances, each was given a checkup at a makeshift medical camp in the tunnel entrance.

The rescue was expected to be straightforward and last only a few days, but a series of setbacks led to its expansion and to the workers being trapped for more than two weeks.

During the final stretch, about a dozen rescuers took turns digging through rocks and debris overnight Monday into Tuesday using hand-held drilling tools, said Kirti Panwar, a state government spokesperson.

Rescuers resorted to digging by hand after the machine they had been using broke down Friday. The machine had bored through about 47 meters (51 yards) of the roughly 57-60 meters (62-66 yards) needed to reach the workers.

The workers were extracted one by one on a wheeled stretcher that was pulled through a roughly meter-wide (yard-wide) tunnel of welded pipes that crews had pushed through the dug-out space.

Devender, a rescuer who only gave his first name, told the New Delhi Television channel that "the trapped workers were overjoyed when they spotted us in the tunnel. Some rushed toward me and hugged me."

World

WITH DEADLINE LOOMING

Diplomats seek to extend Gaza truce

AP

Palestinian prisoner Fairuze Salameh is greeted after she was released, in the West Bank town of Ramallah, early Wednesday Nov. 29, 2023.

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP)—Hamas and Israel released more hostages and prisoners under terms of a fragile cease-fire that held for a fifth day Tuesday as international mediators in Qatar worked to extend the truce. The United States urged Israel to better protect Palestinian civilians in Gaza if it follows through on its promise to resume the war.

In the latest swap since the cease-fire began Friday, Israel said 10 of its citizens and two Thai nationals were freed by Hamas and had been returned to Israel. Soon after, Israel released 30 Palestinian prisoners. The truce is due to end after one more exchange Wednesday night.

For the first time, Israel and Hamas blamed each other for an exchange of fire between troops and militants in northern Gaza. There was no indication it would endanger the truce, which has enabled humanitarian aid to flow into Gaza.

CIA director William Burns and David Barnea, who heads Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, were in Qatar, a key mediator with Hamas, to discuss extending the cease-fire and releasing more hostages, a diplomat said on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the talks. U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken was set to visit the region this week.

Israel has vowed to resume the war to end Hamas' 16-year rule in Gaza and crush its military capabilities once it's clear that no more hostages will be freed under the deal. That would almost certainly require expanding its ground offensive from northern Gaza to the south, where most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million is now crowded. It's unclear where they would go if Israel does so as Egypt has refused to accept refugees and Israel has sealed its border.

The Biden administration told Israel it must avoid "significant further displacement" of and mass casualties among Palestinian civilians if it resumes its offensive, and that it must operate with more precision in southern Gaza than it has in the north, according to U.S. officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity under ground rules set by the White House.

Hamas and other militants still hold about 160 hostages out of 240 seized in their Oct. 7 assault into southern Israel that ignited the war. Israel has said it is willing to extend the cease-fire by one day for every 10 additional hostages that Hamas releases, according to the deal brokered by the Qatar, Egypt and the U.S. But Hamas is expected to make much higher demands for the release of captive Israeli soldiers.

Ukraine says spy chief's wife being treated for poisoning with heavy metals

KYIV, Ukraine (AP)—The wife of Ukraine's intelligence chief has been diagnosed with heavy metals poisoning and is undergoing treatment in a hospital, a spokesperson for the agency said Tuesday as the country's war with Russia stretched into its 22nd month.

Marianna Budanova is the wife of Lt. Gen. Kyrylo Budanov, the head of the military intelligence agency that is known in Ukrainian as GUR for short. Her condition was confirmed to The Associated Press by Andrii Yusov, the agency's spokesman.

Yusov did not provide more details about the alleged poisoning, nor did he say if it was believed to have been intended for Budanov or whether Russia was thought to be behind it. Earlier this year, he told Ukrainian media that military intelligence chief had survived 10 assassination attempts carried out by the Russian state security service, or FSB.

Previously, Budanov had also told local media that his wife lives with him in his office, which could suggest he was the intended target for the poisoning.

There was no immediate comment on the poisoning claim from the Russian government, which has long been suspected of poisoning opponents. Russia media and commentators picked up the Ukrainian reports, with some speculating that it could be part of infighting in Ukraine.

Local media, quoting their sources in GUR, said Budanova was hospitalized in Kyiv.

The exact nature of the heavy metals that caused the poisoning has not been made public. However, local media said the metals were not used domestically or in military equipment, so the GUR representatives presume the poisoning was carried out intentionally, possibly through food or drink.

Apart from Budanova, who has been married to Budanov since 2013, several GUR personnel also were diagnosed with the same poisoning, according to local newspaper Ukrainska Pravda.

Environment

Sumatran rhino calf adds to endangered species of fewer than 50

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP)—A critically endangered Sumatran rhino was born in Indonesia's western island of Sumatra on Saturday, the second Sumatran rhino born in the country this year and a welcome addition to a species that currently numbers fewer than 50 animals.

A female named Delilah gave birth to a 25-kilogram (55-pound) male calf at a sanctuary for Sumatran rhinos in Way Kambas National Park in Lampung province, at the southern tip of Sumatra island.

The calf is fathered by a male named Harapan, who was born at the Cincinnati Zoo in 2006. He was the last Sumatran rhino in the world to be repatriated to Indonesia, meaning that the entire population of Sumatran rhinos is now in Indonesia.

Most of the remaining rhinos live on Sumatra, several in captivity. They are threatened by destruction of tropical forest habitat and poachers who kill the animals for their horns, which are prized for making ornaments and for use in traditional medicine in China and other parts of Asia.

"This birth is also the birth of the second Sumatran rhino in 2023. It emphasizes the government commitment of the Indonesian Government on the rhino conservation efforts in Indonesia, especially the Sumatran rhino," Indonesian Environment and Forestry Minister Siti Nurbaya Bakar said in a written statement.

She added that, from the semi-natural breeding efforts, there were five live births of Sumatran rhinos at the Way Kambas sanctuary.

A conservation guard found Delilah with the newborn male calf next to her on Saturday morning, 10 days earlier than the estimated date of delivery.

Delilah and her baby are in good condition as the calf is now able to stand upright and walk. Not long after he was discovered, he was able to breastfeed in a standing position, said a statement from Indonesia' Environment and Forestry Ministry.

The Sumatran rhino is legally protected in Indonesia. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species describes the Sumatran rhinos as critically endangered: the population is declining and only about 30 mature animals remain.

The yet-to-be-named calf is the first success delivery from Delilah.

Delilah, a 7-year-old female, was born in an Indonesian sanctuary in 2016.

She was the second calf born to her mother, Ratu, who also gave birth to a male named Andatu in 2012, the first rhino birth in captivity in Indonesia in 124 years. The father, Andalas, was born at the Cincinnati Zoo in 2001.

In September, Ratu, a 23-year-old female rhino, gave birth to a female rhino at the sanctuary in Lampung. Sumatran rhinos typically have a life expectancy of 35 to 40 years, according to the WWF conservation group.

INDONESIAN MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTRY VIA AP

In this undated photo released by Indonesian Ministry of Environment and Forestry, a newly born Sumatran rhino calf walks in its enclosure at Sumatran Rhino Sanctuary at Way Kambas National Park, Indonesia.

Spain creates 1.4B-euro deal to help protect Doñana wetland

AP

Cracks in the mud are visible in a dry wetland in Doñana natural park, southwest Spain, Wednesday, Oct. 19, 2022.

MADRID (AP)—National and regional authorities in Spain signed an agreement Monday to invest 1.4 billion euros ($1.5 billion) in areas around the treasured national park of Doñana in a bid to stop the park from drying up.

Ecological Transition Minister Teresa Ribera said the plan was aimed at encouraging farmers to stop cultivating crops that rely heavily on water from underground aquifers that have been overexploited in recent years, damaging one of Europe's largest wetlands.

"This is an agreement with which we put an end to pressure on a natural treasure the likes of which there are few in the world," Ribera said.

Andalusia regional President Juan Moreno said farmers will receive financial incentives to stop cultivating and to reforest land in and around some 14 towns close to Doñana. He said farmers who wish to continue cultivating will receive less money but must switch to farming dry crops ecologically.

As part of the agreement, Andalusia will cancel previously announced plans to expand irrigation near Doñana, a decision that UNESCO, the central government and ecologists criticized for putting more pressure on the aquifer.

A UNESCO World Heritage Site and Biosphere Reserve, Doñana is a wintering site for half a million waterfowl and a stopover spot for millions more birds that migrate from Africa to northern Europe.

Ecologists working in and near the park have long warned that its ecosystem of marshes and lagoons is under severe strain because of agriculture and tourism. The situation has been made worse by climate change and a long drought, along with record high temperatures.

Andalusia recently announced a plan to allow the Doñana park to annex some 7,500 hectares (18,500 acres) by purchasing land from a private owner for 70 million euros.

Doñana currently covers 74,000 hectares (182,000 acres) on an estuary where the Guadalquivir River meets the Atlantic Ocean on Spain's southern coast.

AS MEXICO MARKS CONSERVATION DAY

Advocates say it takes too long to list vulnerable species

MEXICO CITY (AP)—Residents of Mexico's Caribbean reef island of Banco Chinchorro near Belize have hunted the meat and salmon-pink shells of queen conch for generations. As populations have shrunk in recent decades, Mexico has enforced limits and bans on catching the shellfish.

The species has continued to decline despite these measures, which included a blanket five-year ban on catches in 2012. Still, the queen conch is one of many vulnerable species not included on Mexico's national endangered species list.

As Mexico's environment agency celebrates the country's biodiversity during Monday's national conservation day, conservationists say the government's own registry for endangered species is too short and too slow to update.

Despite a legal requirement to review and update the list at least every three years, there have been no updates since August 2019. In the meantime, species like the queen conch have lacked federal environmental protection and moved steadily toward extinction.

The Mexican environment department did not respond to emails and text messages asking why there had not been any updates to the list since 2019.

Officials accept proposals to list species only during set periods for public comment. That system is opaque and slow, said Alejandro Olivera, a marine biologist at the Center for Biological Diversity.

"We shouldn't have to wait until the government requests for new listings, because species can go extinct or populations can recover from one year to another," Olivera said from La Paz, on the Gulf of California.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, by comparison, accepts submissions on a rolling basis, and has to make an initial response within 90 days. It's still not perfect, Olivera said, but better than a system of submission windows.

"Even if you have the hard data, the scientific information to prove that one species is really endangered, the process is not open," Olivera said. "You can't submit the proposal just out of the blue."

The Mexican government most recently opened a comment window in April 2021, when the Center for Biological Diversity submitted a proposal to list the queen conch, but the group never heard back.

One of the experts convened to adjudicate those proposals was Angélica Cervantes Maldonado, a plant biology professor at Mexico's National Autonomous University. She acknowledged that it has taken much longer than the mandated three-year period to update the list.

"I know the situation of species is complicated and can deteriorate very quickly, but unfortunately here the regulatory process is much slower," she said, adding that the department expects to publish updates around April.

Mexico's current list was written into law in 2010, and has been updated three times since then, once to make it shorter.

While some species like the queen conch aren't federally protected at all, many more are listed but with a far lesser degree of danger than the science suggests, said Olivera.

The population of elkhorn coral, for example, another Caribbean species, with large, ochre branches growing six feet tall, has declined 97% over the past four decades, according to the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature, or IUCN, lists elkhorn coral as critically endangered, the last step before extinction. Meanwhile elkhorn coral has the lowest level of endangerment on Mexico's list, despite scientists' requests to review its classification for at least five years.

Compared to the IUCN, last updated in 2022, the Mexican government lists 250 fewer species as needing some kind of protection, and most fall under the lowest risk category. In particular, Mexico lists 535 species as endangered, its worst risk rating, whereas IUCN lists nearly 1,500 species in Mexico as either endangered or critically endangered.

If a species is included on Mexico's list in any category, all commercial uses of that species are banned. Higher categories come with greater restrictions, fines and the potential for criminal prosecution. The list also impacts other permitting and pollution regulations, restricting development in areas where listed species are known to live in some cases.

The IUCN says Mexico ranks third in the word for the number of endangered species after Ecuador and Madagascar.

Life & Style

Judge cites handwritten will, awards real estate to Aretha's sons

DETROIT (AP)—A judge overseeing the estate of Aretha Franklin awarded real estate to the late star's sons, citing a handwritten will from 2014 that was found between couch cushions.

The decision Monday came four months after a Detroit-area jury said the document was a valid will under Michigan law, despite scribbles and many hard-to-read passages. Franklin had signed it and put a smiley face in the letter "A."

The papers will override a handwritten will from 2010 that was found at Franklin's suburban Detroit home around the same time in 2019, the judge said.

One of her sons, Kecalf Franklin, will get that property, which was valued at $1.1 million in 2018, but is now worth more. A lawyer described it as the "crown jewel" before trial last July.

Another son, Ted White II, who had favored the 2010 will, was given a house in Detroit, though it was sold by the estate for $300,000 before the dueling wills had emerged.

"Teddy is requesting the sale proceeds," Charles McKelvie, an attorney for Kecalf Franklin, said Tuesday.

Judge Jennifer Callaghan awarded a third son, Edward Franklin, another property under the 2014 will.

Aretha Franklin had four homes when she died of pancreatic cancer in 2018. The discovery of the two handwritten wills months after her death led to a dispute between the sons over what their mother wanted to do with her real estate and other assets.

One of the properties, worth more than $1 million, will likely be sold and the proceeds shared by four sons. The judge said the 2014 will didn't clearly state who should get it.

"This was a significant step forward. We've narrowed the remaining issues," McKelvie said of the estate saga.

There's still a dispute over how to handle Aretha Franklin's music assets, though the will appears to indicate that the sons would share any income. A status conference with the judge is set for January.

Franklin was a global star for decades, known especially for hits in the late 1960s like "Think," "I Say a Little Prayer" and "Respect."

Pop singer Sabrina Carpenter's music video spurs outrage for using NY Catholic church as a setting

NEW YORK (AP)—Pop singer Sabrina Carpenter's use of a Roman Catholic church in Brooklyn as a backdrop for parts of a music video, with her dancing next to pastel-colored coffins, led to its pastor being stripped of his administrative duties after its release and officials holding a Mass to restore the church's "sanctity."

AP

Sabrina Carpenter arrives at the MTV Video Music Awards, Sept. 12, 2023, in Newark, N.J.

Carpenter, who as a youth appeared on the Disney Channel, released the video for "Feather" on Oct. 31; in it, she's in several scenarios with men who behave badly, like taking a nonconsensual photo of her body, and then die in grisly ways. At the end, Carpenter, 24, is filmed dancing in the Annunciation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church, wearing a short tulle dress and a black veil.

The day after its release, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, which oversees the Catholic churches in Brooklyn and Queens, issued a statement saying that proper procedures around allowing filming had not been followed and it was "appalled."

A few days later, the diocese stripped administrative duties away from the church pastor, Monsignor Jamie Gigantiello, and ended his stint as vicar of development for the diocese.

The diocese said Bishop Robert Brennan also celebrated a Mass of Reparation at the church and "through the offering of this Mass, Bishop Brennan has restored the sanctity of this church and repaired the harm."

Emails seeking comment were sent to representatives for Carpenter and the video director, Mia Barnes.

In a post on Facebook following those actions asking for the church community's forgiveness, Gigantiello said a film crew had come to them in September, and that he allowed filming after not finding anything untoward in a search of the participants. He said he had agreed as an "effort to further strengthen the bonds between the young creative artists who make up a large part of this community."

'Past Lives,' Lily Gladstone win at Gotham Awards, while Robert De Niro says his speech was edited

NEW YORK (AP)—Celine Song's wistful romance "Past Lives" earned top honors at the Gotham Awards on Monday evening at an award-season kickoff where the night's biggest drama came in a political speech by Robert De Niro that the actor claimed had been edited without his permission.

"Past Lives," a breakout at the Sundance Film Festival in January and an arthouse hit in June for A24, may be poised to be an Oscar sleeper this year after winning best feature film at the Gothams. Affection is strong for Song's directorial debut, starring Greta Lee as a woman born in Seoul who, after marrying an American (John Magaro), reconnects with a childhood friend from South Korea (Teo Yoo).

"This is the first film I've ever made and a very personal film about an extraordinary feeling I had in an ordinary bar in the East Village, not too many blocks away from here," said Song, accepting the award. "As this film has been shared with the world, it has taught me—and taught us—that you're never alone in that extraordinary feeling."

"Past Lives" was expected to win, but the ceremony went off-script when De Niro, co-star in Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon," took the podium to present a tribute award to the film. While giving his remarks, De Niro noticed a section had been omitted on the teleprompter. After attempting to scroll back through, he completed his speech before returning to read from his phone.

"The beginning of my speech was edited, cut out," De Niro said. "I didn't know about it."

De Niro, known for his fiery rhetoric against former President Donald Trump, then expanded on what he called America's "post-truth society" and chided Hollywood—specifically John Wayne—for earlier depictions of Native Americans.

Michael Douglas gets lifetime achievement award

PANAJI, India (AP)—Veteran Hollywood actor and producer Michael Douglas was honored with the Satyajit Ray Lifetime Achievement Award at the 54th International Film Festival of India as it came to a close on Tuesday.

The two-time Academy Award winner, 79, said he was "humbled" and with everything going on the world, the festival was "a reminder of the magic of moviemaking."

"Cinema is one of the few mediums that has the power to unite and transform us. It transcends divisions, whether that be geography, race language and even time," he said in his acceptance speech.

"Today our global language of cinema is more meaningful than ever," Douglas added.

"Endless Borders," an Iranian film directed by Abbas Amini, won the Golden Peacock for best film at the festival held annually in coastal Goa, India's scenic tourist hotspot.

"The film is about how complicated physical borders might be yet nothing can be more complicated than the emotional and moral borders that you impose upon yourself," the jury said in its citation.

The film is about an exiled Iranian teacher in a poor village on the border of Afghanistan and Iran who becomes acquainted with a family fleeing Afghanistan under threat from the Taliban.

Absentee mother's prognosis prompts different reactions

DEAR ABBY: I was married young to my high school sweetheart. We had five children together. During that time, I joined the Air Force. After six years of marriage, I discovered my wife was cheating on me. Once I realized we couldn't reconcile, I told her I wanted a divorce and custody of the children. She agreed. It cost me my career with the USAF.

Flash-forward to today: Thirty-seven years have passed. I have never said a bad word to my children about their mother. My ex never took the time to build meaningful relationships with them. My oldest daughter once tried to have a relationship with her. A month or so later, she asked, "Dad, why did you ever marry that woman?"

I have just learned from my oldest daughter that her mother is dying and has less than six months to live. My oldest shared the news with her siblings, who had given up on having a mother years ago. She also offered to drive her mom to appointments.

Do you think it would be good for my children to write letters to their mother, expressing their feelings toward her and giving her forgiveness from their point of view? Their ages range from 38 to 43. They are stable, hardworking adults and great parents as well.

DO-RIGHT DAD IN OHIO

DEAR DAD: You are a thoughtful, caring and forgiving parent. Your children are adults now. You might "suggest" this to them, but do not pressure them into doing anything with which they are uncomfortable. They may not deeply grieve their mother's passing in light of the fact that she left them behind decades ago.

■ ■ ■

DEAR ABBY: I have a good Christian friend in her 70s who has basically done nothing with her life. Her husband supports her. For 35 years, my friend has been saying, "God will show me what I should do." How can I tell her that God helps those who help themSELVES?

She suffers from bouts of severe depression but will not even choose a hobby because she's waiting on God. Of course, I can't help her to help herself, so I feel at a loss. And it's difficult for me to watch her wait for answers that never come. What advice would you offer?

FRUSTRATED FRIEND IN GEORGIA

DEAR FRIEND: You stated that this woman is a good friend. If you have offered her suggestions about how to utilize her time and they have been ignored, you may find less frustration if you quit doing that. You cannot "fix" her indecision.

However, when she starts cycling down into another depression, you should urge her to discuss it with her doctor. If she says she's waiting for God to tell her to do that, because God isn't telling her anything directly, explain that God sometimes speaks to us through the people who love us, of which you are one. Hope it will stir her to action, because there is help for those who suffer from depressive illness.

■ ■ ■

To receive a collection of Abby's most memorable – and most frequently requested – poems and essays, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby – Keepers Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

DEAR ABBY

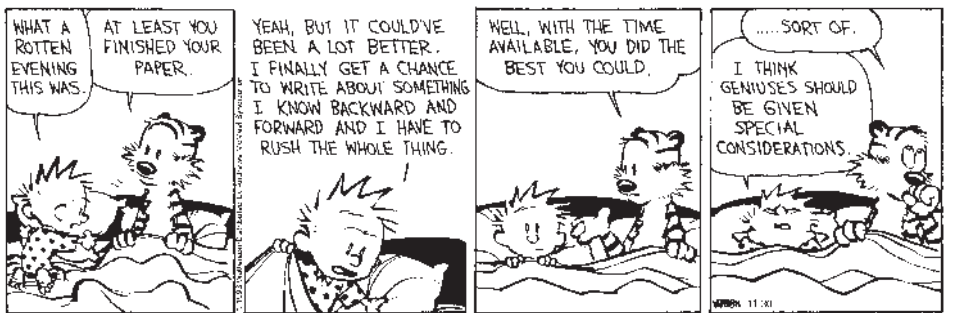
By Abigail Van Buren
UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson


WHAT A ROTTEN EVENING THIS WAS.
AT LEAST YOU FINISHED YOUR PAPER.
YEAH, BUT IT COULD'VE BEEN A LOT BETTER. I FINALLY GET A CHANCE TO WRITE ABOUT SOMETHING I KNOW BACKWARD AND FORWARD AND I HAVE TO RUSH THE WHOLE THING.
WELL, WITH THE TIME AVAILABLE, YOU DID THE BEST YOU COULD.
.....SORT OF.
I THINK GENIUSES SHOULD BE GIVEN SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS.

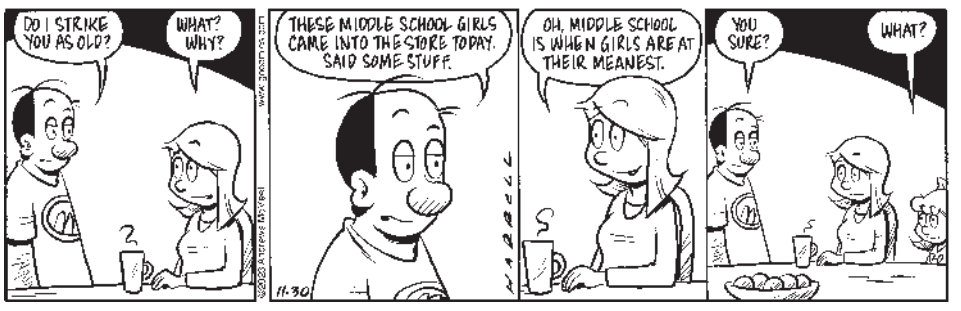
Garfield®

By Jim Davis

AND NOW, A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR. BLAH-DEE BLAH-DEE BLAH-DEE BLAH-DEE DAH
WELCOME BACK. MY NEXT GUEST IS THE ONE YOU'VE ALL BEEN WAITING FOR!
BUT FIRST, A WORD FROM OUR SPONSOR
JIM DAVIS 11-30

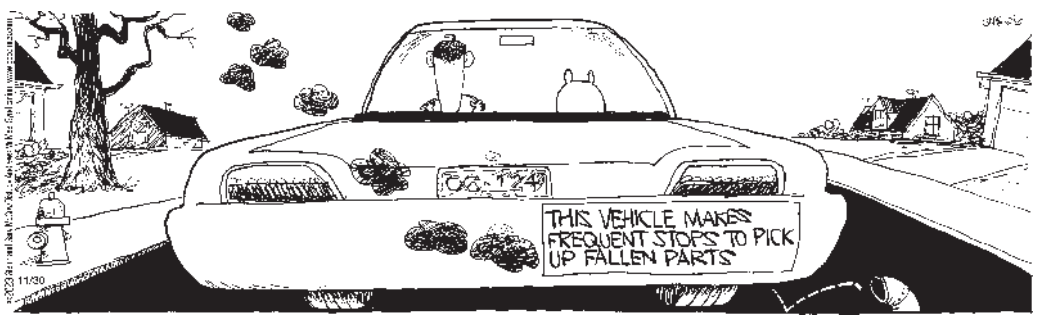
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


DO I STRIKE YOU AS OLD?
WHAT? WHY?
THESE MIDDLE SCHOOL GIRLS CAME INTO THE STORE TODAY. SAID SOME STUFF.
OH, MIDDLE SCHOOL IS WHEN GIRLS ARE AT THEIR MEANEST.
YOU SURE?
WHAT?
11-30

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy



CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
1 First lady of scat
5 "Jeopardy!" champion — Buttrey
8 Oriole or wren
12 "Carpe —!"
13 Espionage org.
14 Grooving on
15 Region
16 Blunder
17 Impetuous
18 Brando of "The Godfather"
20 Foot fraction
22 Gardener's gift
26 Countrified
29 "Not impressed"
30 Seminary subj.
31 "Excuse me ..."
32 "Blue Bloods" airer
33 Roughly
34 Burst
35 Take to court
36 Secret rendezvous
37 Computer storage device
40 Starring role
41 Bets
45 WNBA star Leslie
47 Floral ring
49 Antioxidant berry
50 Joel or Ethan of Hollywood
51 Triage ctrs.
52 Par
53 Clothing
54 Doo follower
55 Till bills

DOWN
1 Dutch cheese
2 Old Italian money
3 Lusty look
4 Dental filler
5 Public outburst
6 Melody
7 Iwo Jima soldiers
8 Canoe material
9 Rushing
10 ACLU issues
11 Homer's cry
19 Magic, on scoreboards
21 Ultimate
23 Glowing coal
24 Disarray
25 Ink smudge
26 Engrossed
27 "Oops!"
28 Drove away
32 Hugged
33 Pizza sauce herb
35 Govt. loan agcy.
36 FDR project
38 Stands for
39 "If only!"
42 Nobel Prize subj.
43 Scarce
44 Supermodel Molly
45 PC screen type
46 Chit
48 Time line period

Solution time: 24 mins.

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Yesterday's answer 11-30

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31				■	32			■	33			
34			■	35			■	36				
37			38				39			■	■	■
■	■	40				■	41			42	43	44
45	46			■	47	48		■	49			
50				■	51			■	52			
53				■	54			■	55			

STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955!** 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Kaley Cuoco, 38; Elisha Cuthbert, 41; Ben Stiller, 58; Billy Idol, 68.

Happy Birthday: Adjust how you deal with money, contracts and health issues. Don't let anyone control decisions that influence how you live. Design your routine to fit your needs, and take advantage of your skills and insight into what you want to pursue. Approach relationships with equality in mind and refuse to let anyone take control of matters that influence your future. Your numbers are 8, 15, 24, 29, 31, 42, 47.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19)*: Keep your thoughts to yourself. Focus on monitoring your finances, health and any contractual dealings that need your attention. Don't believe everything you hear. Do your due diligence and make decisions based on facts. Mixing business with pleasure will lead to problems. ✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20)*: Look for an opportunity and follow your plans. Be open regarding your intentions and be open-minded to suggestions. Think big, but stay within your means. Too much of anything will be your downfall. Be cautious of empty promises and partnerships. ✪✪✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20)*: Take care of pressing matters and talk through any conflicts you face openly and honestly. Verify the information you receive and put your heart and soul into what makes you happy. Learn from the experience you gain and put your energy into reaching your objective. ✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22)*: Monitor what you are trying to achieve. Let your imagination lead you in a direction that helps you stand out and surpass anyone trying to compete with you. Let your experience be your guide, and you'll make a connection that leads to possibilities. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22)*: Keep life simple. Take care of your responsibilities without letting drama take over. Focus on progress, completion and building a solid base to house what's important to you. Don't deny yourself love and happiness. Participate in pastimes that bring you joy. ✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22)*: Use your imagination and offer fair plans that address issues that concern you and anyone you live with or near. Working in unison will help you bring about positive change and opportunities if you are willing to compromise. Anger won't solve problems. ✪✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22)*: Don't put up with mind games, especially when money or legalities are involved. A third party will help you navigate your way to a fair deal. Overdoing it will cost you physically. Don't try to do something that can lead to injury or illness. ✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21)*: Be clear when offering your thoughts and feelings. An open discussion will provide insight into how to move forward. A relationship can prosper from a shake-up if handled appropriately. Look for an opportunity at work to seize the moment. Play by the rules and speak the truth. ✪✪✪✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21)*: Respond respectfully, but don't give anyone the chance to take advantage of you. Keep an open mind and a closed wallet until you are sure you want to participate in something that involves money or joint ownership. Don't fold under pressure; protect your reputation. ✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19)*: Don't sign up for something strenuous or put yourself in a vulnerable position. It's better to be safe than sorry regarding illness or injury. Put more thought into personal investments, home improvements and nurturing meaningful relationships. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18)*: You'll gain momentum if you don't take an emotional detour. Stay focused on your objective and walk away from situations that make you feel uncomfortable. Stick to what you know and do what you do best. A self-improvement project will pay off. ✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20)*: Use your imagination, be creative and refuse to let anyone pressure or push you to do something you don't care to do. A change will spark your interest or bring you in contact with someone with something to contribute to your plans. ✪✪✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are accommodating, active and charismatic. You are imaginative and well-liked.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

		9	4		7		1	
		1			6		3	
					9	4		
	8		7	9	5	2		
2		5	3			7		
	4					5		
				7				
		6		5			4	
3				2			7	6

Difficulty: ★★★ 11/30

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Yesterday's Answer

3	6	8	9	2	4	5	7	1
5	7	4	6	1	3	2	8	9
2	9	1	5	8	7	3	6	4
7	8	2	1	4	5	9	3	6
9	1	6	2	3	8	4	5	7
4	3	5	7	9	6	1	2	8
8	2	3	4	6	1	7	9	5
6	4	7	3	5	9	8	1	2
1	5	9	8	7	2	6	4	3

Difficulty: ★★★ 11/29

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WONDERWORD

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

PUDDLES Solution: 8 letters

R	A	E	L	C	L	A	Y	R	E	P	P	I	L	S
E	A	W	R	E	W	O	H	S	T	O	R	M	A	I
T	L	I	O	U	Y	P	G	A	R	D	E	N	L	D
A	L	L	N	R	T	A	E	V	I	R	D	E	L	E
W	E	D	I	B	M	A	L	S	S	T	A	B	A	W
O	R	L	S	Q	O	S	N	P	N	V	O	U	M	A
E	B	I	G	L	U	W	R	E	E	O	T	B	S	L
T	M	F	O	H	A	I	M	S	T	O	W	B	T	K
A	U	E	D	L	N	N	D	S	K	E	D	L	E	R
R	D	K	L	G	O	S	D	O	S	C	L	E	L	E
O	R	I	E	R	W	A	R	N	O	K	O	S	P	H
P	A	B	I	H	T	A	P	O	O	L	C	R	O	T
A	I	V	F	L	O	W	E	R	S	P	F	U	R	A
V	N	O	I	T	C	E	L	F	E	R	O	A	D	E
E	R	U	T	A	R	E	P	M	E	T	I	D	E	W

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Bike, Boots, Bubbles, Clay, Clear, Cold, Dogs, Drain, Drive, Droplets, Ducks, Environment, Evaporate, Field, Flood, Flowers, Garden, Land, Leaves, Liquid, Nature, Path, Play, Pond, Pool, Rainbow, Reflection, Road, Rocks, Sand, Shower, Sidewalk, Slippery, Small, Snow, Spring, Storm, Temperature, Tide, Umbrella, Warn, Water, Weather, Wildlife, Worms

Yesterday's Answer: Treasure

The NEW **TELEWORD VINTAGE COLLECTION EDITION #1** can be purchased online at www.WonderWordBooks.com. In Canada, call 1-855-232-2367)

Bucks earn quarterfinal berth by topping Heat, 131-124

MIAMI (AP)—With the game on the line, the Milwaukee Bucks were just about perfect.

And they're headed to the In-Season Tournament quarterfinals.

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points, Damian Lillard added 32 and the Bucks rallied in the fourth quarter to beat the Miami Heat 131-124 on Tuesday night and clinch a home quarterfinal game in the NBA's inaugural in-season event.

"The one thing that we do have going for us is we know how to win the game," Lillard said. "We know how to do the things to win a game."

The Bucks closed the game on a 16-6 run, going 5 for 6 from the field and 5 for 5 from the line in that stretch. Khris Middleton scored 17, Malik Beasley had 16 and Brook Lopez 12 for the Bucks, who won East Group B with a 4-0 record.

They'll host wild-card New York next Tuesday, with East Group C winner Boston going to Group A winner Indiana for the other quarterfinal before the Final Four in Las Vegas.

"Let's focus on Chicago and go from there," Bucks coach Adrian Griffin said, noting that his team still has games against the Bulls and Atlanta before the quarterfinal game against the Knicks.

Bam Adebayo scored 31 points for the Heat, who got 21 from Kyle Lowry and 20 from Josh Richardson. Jaime Jaquez Jr. and Caleb Martin each scored 14 and Duncan Robinson added 13 for the Heat.

AP

Miami Heat center Bam Adebayo (13) drives to the basket against Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo (34) during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2023, in Miami.

CELTICS 124, BULLS 97

BOSTON (AP)—Jaylen Brown scored 30 points, Jayson Tatum had 21 and Boston routed Chicago to advance to the quarterfinals of the NBA In-Season Tournament.

The Celtics won a three-team tiebreaker with Orlando and Brooklyn via point differential to take Group C and earn the No. 3 seed in the Eastern Conference. They will visit the No. 2 Indiana Pacers next week.

The Celtics made a season-high 21 3-pointers, getting four each from Al Horford and Jrue Holiday. All five Boston starters scored in double figures.

Horford finished with 16 points and nine rebounds. Holiday, who returned after missing two games with a sprained right ankle, had 14 points, nine assists and seven rebounds.

KNICKS 115, HORNETS 91

NEW YORK (AP)—Julius Randle had 25 points and 20 rebounds, RJ Barrett scored 16 points and New York advanced to the quarterfinals of the NBA In-Season Tournament with a victory over Charlotte.

The Knicks missed their chance to win Group B when the Milwaukee Bucks beat the Miami Heat to finish unbeaten in pool play. But the Knicks took the wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference by tiebreaker because of their point differential in the preliminary round.

The Knicks will visit the Bucks, the East's No. 1 seed, either Monday or Tuesday.

Reserves Immanuel Quickley scored 23 points and Josh Hart chipped in 17 as the New York bench outscored Charlotte's 50-35.

KINGS 124, WARRIORS

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP)—Malik Monk hit a fadeaway with 7 seconds left and Sacramento rallied late to beat Golden State and advance to the quarterfinals of the In-Season Tournament.

The Kings won their group with a 4-0 record and will host New Orleans next week in the quarterfinals. Sacramento needed a win or a loss by 11 points or fewer but ended up with the victory thanks to a furious comeback fueled by two late turnovers by the Warriors.

Andrew Wiggins' tip-in put Golden State up by five with 59 seconds left. But De'Aaron Fox hit a free throw and Monk hit a 3-pointer following a turnover by Stephen Curry.

Draymond Green turned it over on the next possession, setting the stage for Monk's go-ahead shot. The Warriors had no timeouts left and Curry missed a 3 at the buzzer to give Sacramento its first win in three tries against Golden State this season.

Fox led the way with 29 points, with Monk and Kevin Huerter adding 21 apiece.

Curry and Wiggins each scored 29 for the Warriors, who have lost eight of 10 games.

MAVERICKS 121, ROCKETS 115

DALLAS (AP)—Luka Doncic had 41 points, nine rebounds and nine assists, and Dallas prevented Houston from advancing to the quarterfinals of the NBA In-Season Tournament.

Kyrie Irving added 22 of his 27 points in the second half for the Mavericks, who had already been eliminated. Their victory allowed the New Orleans Pelicans to win Group B in the Western Conference with a 3-1 record.

The Mavericks, who trailed by nine points in the third quarter, grabbed the lead for good at 99-98 with 6:25 to play on a drive by Irving. Leading 103-100 with 5:25 left, they went on an 8-2 run that included three free throws by Derrick Jones Jr. when he was fouled by Dillon Brooks on a 25-footer with the shot clock about to expire.

Alperen Sengun had a season-best 31 points for the Rockets, who had six scorers in double figures. Fred VanVleet had 10 points and 12 assists.

CAVALIERS 128, HAWKS 105

CLEVELAND (AP)—Donovan Mitchell scored 40 points, Evan Mobley added 17 points and a career-high 19 rebounds, and Cleveland completed pool play in the NBA In-Season Tournament with a win over Atlanta.

The Cavs finished 3-1 and in second place in East Group A. They had to win to have any chance of capturing a wild-card entry, but needed four other teams to lose and ultimately fell short of advancing by point differential.

Still, the Cavs are getting healthy and Mitchell had his best performance (14 of 25, 11 rebounds) in weeks and did it in a meaningful game - by regular-season standards. Darius Garland added 19 points.

De'Andre Hunter scored 18 for the Hawks, who went 1-3 in the tourney. Trae Young added 13 on 3-of-14 shooting and had 10 assists.

TIMBERWOLVES 106, THUNDER 103

MINNEAPOLIS (AP)—Rudy Gobert had 17 points, 16 rebounds and four blocks, reserve Troy Brown Jr. scored 17 points and Minnesota withstood an injury to Anthony Edwards to beat Oklahoma City in the NBA In-Season Tournament.

Edwards had 12 of his 21 points in the third quarter to lead the Timberwolves back from a deficit they faced for most of the first half, before landing hard on his right side during a dunk attempt and leaving the game in pain.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 32 points on 13-for-22 shooting for the Thunder. His 37-foot try to tie at the buzzer, his only 3-point attempt of the night, was well off the mark. Brown made one of two foul shots with 4.5 seconds left to give the Thunder an opening.

NETS 115, RAPTORS 103

NEW YORK (AP)—Spencer Dinwiddie scored 23 points to lead Brooklyn over Toronto Raptors to win its third straight, but was knocked out of the NBA In-Season Tournament.

Bridges was one of five players to finish in double-figure scoring for Brooklyn (9-8).

Mikal Bridges scored 22 points, Cam Johnson and Royce O'Neale had 18 apiece, and Nic Claxton chipped in with 15.

In-Season tournament quarterfinals set, with Pacers, Bucks, Lakers, Kings set to host

MIAMI (AP)—Khris Middleton had a thought pop into his head immediately after Milwaukee topped Miami to finish group play in the NBA's In-Season Tournament with an unbeaten record.

"We're going to Vegas," he said.

Maybe. But not yet. Middleton didn't know he'd skipped one important step—the quarterfinals.

Hey, some people are evidently still learning the tournament format. It gets simple now, though, with the inaugural event down to its final eight teams.

In the Eastern Conference, it'll be Milwaukee hosting New York on Dec. 5 and Indiana playing host to Boston on Dec. 4; in the Western Conference, it'll be the Los Angeles Lakers hosting Phoenix on Dec. 5 and Sacramento—thanks to a huge comeback over Golden State—playing host to New Orleans on Dec. 4.

The winners go to Las Vegas for semifinal games on Dec. 7, and those winners play Dec. 9 to be the first team to hoist the NBA Cup and win $500,000 per player, $250,000 for those on two-way deals.

"It'd be pretty cool to be part of history," Middleton said. "You always want to be the first to win something. It'd definitely be cool to be the first to win the first In-Season Tournament."

Milwaukee, Indiana, the Lakers and the Kings all made all the guesswork easy; they were the teams that went 4-0 in group play. Everything else came down to tiebreakers.

In the East, Boston, New York, Cleveland, Orlando and Brooklyn all went 3-1 and kept trying to pile up points. Boston outscored the teams in its group by 27 points, compared with a plus-22 differential for Orlando and plus-20 for Brooklyn. That meant the Celtics won East Group C.

"You just know what the reason is," Nets forward Mikal Bridges said. "It's trying to make it to Vegas. There's no harm at all. We know that point differential is another key besides just winning."

Still, chasing points led to some weirdness in the Celtics' blowout victory over Chicago on Tuesday.

Boston, up by 32 points with 7:02 left, intentionally fouled Chicago's Andre Drummond to try and get the ball back and ensure it would win any differential tiebreaker over the Nets and Magic. Bulls coach Billy Donovan didn't like it, understandably, and seeing Boston's Payton Pritchard shoot a 3-pointer—it missed—up by 26 with 10.8 seconds remaining was something out of the ordinary as well.

"I had to explain to him, 'This is what our people are telling us, this is what we have to do, this is the process towards protecting our lead,'" Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said of his in-game conversation with Donovan. "It gives us the best chance to win and advance."

New York got the East wild card on point differential over the Cavaliers, Magic and Nets.

"I understand the concept," Knicks guard Josh Hart said. "But it's weird."

Here's more weirdness: All the quarterfinal matchups will be between teams that are now assured of playing each other five times in this regular season—something that hasn't happened in the league since 2003-04, when Miami and New Jersey had five meetings.

The West race didn't end up with quite as much drama as the East had with the down-to-the-wire differential chasing. Phoenix (3-1) got the wild card over Minnesota (3-1) because of point differential—the Suns outscored opponents by 34 points, the Timberwolves finished with a differential of zero.

Golden State needed to beat Sacramento by 12 points to win West Group C; the Warriors led by 24 in the first half and by 18 midway through the third quarter, but the Kings roared back to end Golden State's tournament hopes with a 124-123 win.

The 22 teams that didn't make the quarterfinals will play regular-season games on Dec. 6 and Dec. 8 to fill out the two remaining spots on their 82-game schedule. The teams that lose in the quarterfinals will play a to-be-added regular-season game against each other, East vs. East and West vs. West. The semifinal games count as regular-season games as well—and the championship game will not count in the standings.

"Love it. I wish I had an opportunity to be still playing for going to Vegas and the opportunity to play for something in the inaugural year and winning it," Heat guard Kyle Lowry said. "But, you know, I think it's just going to be a really good thing."

And no matter who wins in Vegas, every team still has a chance at the big prize—the NBA title.

"We still have a marathon to run," Lowry said. "That was a sprint."

Eagles stand tall behind Hurts as only 10-1 team in NFL

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—Jalen Hurts did it again.

It? The pronoun could stand for about anything when it comes to Hurts and what he does for the Eagles.

Trail 17-7 at the half in consecutive weeks and rally the Eagles to wins?

Yup, he did it again.

How about trailing at halftime in four straight games overall and guiding the Eagles to wins?

He did it again, too.

Go 10-1 a year after the Eagles also started 10-1 on their way to a Super Bowl appearance?

Yes, he did it with the same flair as he continues to build a strong case for AP NFL MVP.

How about this one: Beat San Francisco at home in consecutive seasons?

The answer to that question is officially TBD, but will be settled soon enough. Ten months after Hurts and the Eagles thumped the 49ers 31-7 in the NFC championship game at the Linc, the rematch is set for Sunday between two of the top teams in the NFL.

The Eagles have the best record in the NFL—strengthened after a 37-34 overtime win against Buffalo—and San Francisco is 8-3.

Take a look at the numbers, and everything seems to favor the Eagles. The Eagles are 27-2 (.931) in their past 29 regular-season games started by Hurts, he has led the Eagles to 14 straight wins against teams with winning records and the Eagles are undefeated at home (5-0) this season.

Not bad.

Not good enough, though, for the oddsmakers. The 49ers are early 2½-point favorites, per FanDuel Sportsbook.

Perhaps it's time for Jason Kelce to break out the dog masks— as in, underdogs—he wore on the way toward Philadelphia's Super Bowl 52 title.

No matter, the Eagles know they always have a chance as long as they have Hurts. The Eagles trailed Buffalo 17-7 at the half, 24-14 through three, 31-28 with 1:52 left in the fourth and 34-31 in OT.

Hurts combined for a career-high five total TDs (three passing, two rushing) and became the first QB in NFL history with 10-plus rushing TDs in three consecutive seasons (10 TDs in 2021 and 13 TDs in 2022).

"We always find a way, and that's something that you can't really take for granted," Hurts said. "It's hard to quantify. Obviously, I have had a ton to clean up and I have not executed to the level of my standard."

Yikes. What's on tap for the rest of the league once Hurts reaches the demanding—likely unreachable—standard he set for himself?

"Winning is the only thing that matters, but the standard is pretty darn important, too," he said. "And so that's what it is."

Hurts was referencing the fact he failed to play a complete game. Last season's NFL MVP runner-up, Hurts was only 4 of 11 for 33 yards and one rushing TD in the first half. In the second, 14 of 20 for 167 yards, three passing TDs, and the winning 12-yard score in OT.

"Just clutch in clutch moments," coach Nick Sirianni said.

AP

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts passes against the Buffalo Bills during the first half of an NFL football game Sunday, Nov. 26, 2023, in Philadelphia.

WHAT'S WORKING

The offense. Hurts accounted for five TDs, DeVonta Smith had seven catches for 106 yards and D'Andre Swift ran for 80 yards to keep the Eagles in the game, even at times when it seemed lost. Hurts' 29-yard, go-ahead TD to wide receiver Olamide Zaccheaus in the back of the end zone in the fourth quarter will go on the short list of one of his top plays on the career highlight reel.

WHAT NEEDS HELP

The defense. The Bills had 505 yards, converted 13 third downs and Josh Allen toyed with the Eagles. Allen threw for 339 yards and two TDs and he rushed for 81 yards and two scores. The Bills even ran for 173 yards.

The Eagles allowed more than 500 yards at home for the first time since 2015. Could just be an off game. It happens. But surely the 49ers are looking for ways to post those kinds of numbers against the Eagles.

STOCK UP

Jake Elliott. He kicked a 59-yard field goal with 20 seconds left in regulation that tied the game 31-all. The distance was long, wind and rain played havoc with field conditions, yet he hit his 26th career 50-plus-yard field goal. He set a career high with six of them this season.

Elliott has converted 8 of 9 field goals during the fourth quarter/overtime this season, including his 54-yard winner against Washington in October.

STOCK DOWN

A.J Brown is in a slump. One of the NFL's top wide receivers, Brown had only five catches for 37 yards (and a TD) a game after he had just one catch for 8 yards against Kansas City.

INJURIES

RT Lane Johnson was a surprise scratch with a groin injury and defensive end Fletcher Cox also suffered a groin injury during the game. There was no immediate word on their availability for Sunday.

KEY NUMBER

2. The Eagles have two overtime wins in a season for the first time since 2000.

NEXT STEPS

Host the 49ers in a rematch of last season's NFC title game on Sunday.

Kareem Jackson says he's meeting with NFL commissioner on Wednesday

DENVER (AP)—Denver Broncos safety Kareem Jackson said he's flying to New York to meet with NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell on Wednesday to get more clarity about his latest suspension and the way the league enforces its player safety rules.

"For me, I see a lot of the same things happening around the league where guys aren't going through what I'm going through—no flags, no fines, no suspensions," Jackson said Tuesday night in his first public comments since drawing his second suspension last week.

"I'm not really sure why I'm being treated the way I'm being treated. I'm making regular football plays, nothing malicious in my opinion," Jackson said. "I just want to know why I'm the only person going through what I'm going through."

Jackson, who's in his 14th NFL season, has been suspended by the league for six games this season, ejected from two others and been fined $89,670 for four illegal hits.

That makes him the league's leader in fines and game checks lost. He's missed three games so far and will miss three more, costing him a total of $837,000 in lost wages.

He drew his second suspension for a hit on Vikings quarterback Joshua Dobbs on his first tackle upon his return from his first suspension two weeks ago. Both times he was suspended for four games but his first one was cut in half on appeal.

Jackson said he wants to ask the commissioner for advice on avoiding future flags, fines and suspensions because he said he's playing like he always has and doesn't think he's crossed the line. Previously, he's said he knows he's drawing extra scrutiny from the league for his spate of fouls.

The league has said he's violating its unnecessary roughness rules by hitting with the crown of his helmet and launching at opponents, which the NFL contends he can avoid even in the heat of the moment.

Jackson counters that the league isn't clear about how defenders should alter their play to avoid the kinds of hits that have gotten him in trouble.

"There's no clarity, a lot of gray area," Jackson said, noting that during his first suspension he got no answers from the league. "I asked them a ton of questions and told them I'll be in the same situations, how am I supposed to play or how am I supposed to go about these situations?

"So, hopefully something comes from this meeting—I don't think much will, because I don't even think they know," Jackson added. "At this point I feel like I'm the poster child for whatever they're trying to get across or prove. So, we'll see."

Jackson sat out Denver's games against the Kansas City Chiefs and Buffalo Bills for a flagged hit of Packers tight end Luke Musgrave on Oct. 22 that led to his second ejection of the season.

His hit of Dobbs upon his return on Nov. 19 didn't draw a flag but it did draw the league's ire again and resulted in his second suspension.

This time, his appeal was denied, so he began this suspension last Sunday when the Broncos beat the Browns 29-12, and he'll miss games against the Texans, Chargers and Lions before he's allowed to return for Denver's game against New England on Christmas Eve.

On Sunday, Denver's defensive backs wore "Free KJack" T-shirts during warmups.

The Broncos (6-5) have won five consecutive games, tied with the Philadelphia Eagles for the league's longest active winning streak, to jump into the playoff conversation.

Jackson isn't allowed to go to the team's headquarters during his suspension, something he also intends to raise with Goodell.

"It's extremely hard" being banned from team facilities, Jackson said. "The guys are playing great. Obviously, for me I just want to be a part of it, be there with the guys. And that's another thing—not being able to be in the building. For the league to advocate for mental health but you know to cut a guy off from everything? You can't come into the building. You can't cold tub and all that kind of stuff in the building.

"I mean, you can't tell me that you care about the guys and then you cut them off. What if I don't have a support system, you know? So, it's a lot of things they're saying and doing that's contradictory in my opinion. So, hopefully I can get some clarity."

Jackson made his comments to reporters from The Associated Press and a few other outlets as he arrived at the Ritz-Carlton in downtown Denver to attend teammate Patrick Surtain II's "Inspire the Dream Gala" benefiting disadvantaged youth.

Billie retains Powerpuff tiara

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
EDITOR

Billie Inabo Pangelinan was thrilled to compete anew in the Powerpuff Class and winning the division was simply icing in the cake in last weekend's 2023 Turkey Cross at the at the Cowtown Race Park.

After being forced to compete in the Mini II Class this past season of the Monster Energy Point Series Race, the 14-year-old Saipan Southern High School student finally rode in familiar waters and won all three heats for 75 points. Guam's Jerian Guzman came second in the Powerpuff Class with 66 points.

TISHA FERRER

Billie Inabo Pangelinan, left, in action with T.J. Ferrer behind in the Mini II Class in last weekend's 2023 Turkey Cross at the at the Cowtown Race Park.

"I was really excited that we were having a Powerpuff Class again! Racing with the girls is always so exciting. We were putting on an exciting show to watch. It was also so much fun racing with the women's class as well."

Aboard her trusty Honda crf150r, Pangelinan said it was a great idea by the Marianas Racing Association to combine the Powerpuff Class and Women's Class in one race.

"The competition from Guam in the Women's Class was so challenging. They combined the two classes that put on a challenge as I had a chance to test myself to race with women on bigger bikes."

As for race conditions, she said "the track conditions were really good. It was really tacky. I definitely had good grip on the track."

Pangelinan then thanked the following for making the 2023 Turkey Cross possible—Grants Office of the Governor's Office, Lt. Gov. David M. Apatang, MarPac (Guy Pudney), JEM Ent. (Ed and Jovie Flores), D&Q Ent., Old Spice, Department of Public Works' Roads and Grounds Division (Mike Borja), Department Corrections Commissioner (Anthony Torres), Corrections Lt. Jeff Quitigua from the DOC Community Outreach Program, YCO True Value, Inas kitchen, Ellery Cruz and Dave Celis for track design and upkeep, and of course the MRA.

And speaking of the Women's Class, Marianna Wenden took the tiara with 72 points, followed by Nanako Celis and Maribel Igitol with 69 points and 60 points, respectively.

In the Mini II Class, Jonathan Aguon took all heats enroute to accumulating 75 points. Pangelinan settled for second with 62 points, while Calix Cruz took third with 56 points.

Other winners were Kanoa Torres in the Peewee ATV Class (75 points), Kyan Mayo in the Peewee I Class (75 points), Royce Butler Peewee II Class (75 points), Julian Lane in the Mini I Class (75 points), and Anella Igitol in the Mini ATV Class (75 points).

Results of the rest of the classes in the 2023 Turley Cross will be published in tomorrow's issue of *Saipan Tribune.*

Sublemente, Romero rule MTB division

By MARK RABAGO
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EDITOR

Butch Sublemente and Kris Romero ruled the mountain bike division of the Saipan Unity Lions Club Pedal for Health Criterium Yearend Bike Race last Sunday in Marpi.

Sublemente completed the 50-kilometer men's category that had bikers pedal three times around the Last Command Post-Mobil Tanapag-Last Command Post route with a time of 1.20:22 to beat out Bryan Ytac (1:20:36) and Rio Jacob (1:25:23).

The 51-year-old Pacific Islands Club Saipan staff said the hardest part of the warm-up to this weekend's 2023 Hell of the Marianas were the uphill climbs.

"It was hard because it's been raining and the road was head so we can't really build momentum," he said in Filipino.

In a way though, the slow pace of the peloton because of the wet road conditions meant Sublemente could hang with the hardcore riders because, admittedly, he had little to no training before Sunday's race.

Good thing being one of the veteran bikers on the island, Sublemente was able to use his experience in dealing with wet road conditions and that proved handy in giving him the win.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Butch Sublemente is flanked by Bryan Ytac, left, and Rio Jacob in the podium for the mountain bike division of Saipan Unity Lions Club Pedal for Health Criterium Yearend Bike Race last Sunday in Marpi.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Kris Romero was the lone rider in the women's division of the mountain bike division of Saipan Unity Lions Club Pedal for Health Criterium Yearend Bike Race last Sunday in Marpi.

He went on to dedicate his win to his wife, Ritchell, and their daughters Alianna and Alyssa.

Romero, for her part, was the lone cyclist in the women's mountain bike division and finished with a time of 1:55:00.

In contrast to Sublemente, the 38-year-old Pacific Quick Print and Post staff thoroughly enjoyed the rainy morning during the race.

"The best part was the strong rain because that meant it was not hot during the race. As a long-distance swimmer, water always makes me stronger," she said in Filipino.

As for the most challenging part of the race, Romero said it was the start because her lungs were still adjusting and she didn't had the benefit of drafting as she was a solo rider.

She then dedicated her triumph to family, friends, and herself, as she too prepares for this Saturday's HOM.

The age group winners were the following: Nap Solis (MTB under 40), Rosalio Quintos (MTB 45-49), Raymund Tolentino (MTB 50-54), Angeles "Wati" Alvarez ((MTB over 60), Renren Gavilo (road bike under 40), Fred Ramilloza (road bike 40-45), Harold Balana (road bike 45-49), Cesar Fortaleza (road bike 50-59), and Edgardo Abalos (road bike over 60).

Proceeds from the Saipan Unity Lions Club Pedal for Health Criterium Yearend Bike Race will be used to fund the Lions Club global cause to cure children's cancer, prevent diabetes, and feed the hungry.

Proceeds from the Saipan Unity Lions Club Pedal for Health Criterium Yearend Bike Race will be used to fund the Lions Club Global cause to cure children's cancer, prevent diabetes, and feed the hungry.

The event's sponsors include Herman's Bakery, Marpac, K.L. Carr Enterprises, Hongs Hardware, The Water Company, Chow Time Restaurant, and Atoy Bangting and other SULC members.

FIFTH

From page 20

Marianas its fifth gold medal in the quadrennial competition. Official times in the 10K race was unavailable at press time, but according to Team Marianas and Northern Marianas Athletics officials, the 22-year-old Tan timed in at sub 40-minute and defeated 13 other runners entered in the longest race in Day 3 of the track and field event.

In other results in athletics, Theodore Rodgers advanced to semifinals of the 200m run after making the grade in the qualifying heat. The 17-year-old runner was on Heat 5 and finished fourth with a time of 23.76 seconds to move to the semis, which will take place tonight. Alexander Go also joined the 200m qualifying race and submitted 24.36 seconds on Heat 1.

In beach volleyball, Logan Mister and Andrew Johnson went 2-0 in Pool C after sweeping Tonga's Latu Sione and Vakalahi Moto in the morning match, 21-3, 21-8. Later last night, Mister and Johnson challenged the gold medalists in last year's Pacific Mini Games—Vanuatu's James Chilia and Stivano Banga and pulled off a cliffhanger in the opening set, 23-21. Scores of the second set was unavailable at press time, but the opposing teams battled in another close match.

In triathlon, Leo Wania completed the course in 49:49 with split times of 9:06 (400m swim), 21:32 (10K bike), and 16:40 (2.KM run).

Meanwhile, beach volleyball and athletics events will continue today, while triathlon will have its grand finale and B finals this morning.

Also scheduled for today is the NMI Men's National Football Team's consolation game against Tuvalu at 12pm (Saipan time). The NMI is looking to end its campaign in the 2023 Pacific Games with back-to-back wins after shutting out American Samoa, 4-0, last Monday.

With three days left in the competitions in the 2023 Pacific Games, New Caledonia has zeroed in on the top spot in the medal tally with its 68-42-43 gold-silver-bronze tally. Team Marianas has a 5-1-6 tally, placing ahead of 13 other countries.

Team Marianas' participation in this year's Pacific Games is supported by the Joeten Daidai Foundation, Triple J, Crowne Plaza Resort, IT&E, IP&E, Tan Siu Lin Foundation, Mobil, Tan Holdings, and McDonald's of Guam & Saipan. ***(PR)***

GOLD

From page 20

ally helping—and obviously the crowd, it was crazy. I don't know if they were cheering for me or Diana or the other Solomon Islands runner, but I felt like they were cheering for me, so I'll just take it; definitely really tired now."

She said she also did not expect to win gold again as she had just run the 5,000m two night ago and that Dianah Matekali from Solomon Islands didn't run it, but Tan just gave it all she got as she had nothing to lose. "I just came out here and gave it all I got and it somehow all just worked out," she said.

She added, "I'm not complaining about the Solomon Islands it is like this because it's the Pacific Islands. They have limited resources—even Saipan, but it is really hot in the rooms, the mattresses are like rock, but I have to think that it's not only you who's experiencing that—everyone else is—unless you book a hotel which I don't think anyone did."

About representing the NMI, she said it felt "really good. I honestly didn't know if I could come because I am still in college, and it is almost finals week. I literally have to go back next week, and I have a presentation on the day I arrive, and I haven't even started yet. I don't know what to do, but this was totally worth it. I'm so glad that I came."

Her advice to young athletes, she said, "For all those girls and men who think they're not good enough, don't give up—please. You'll get there, just keep persevering."

As for the CNMI flag being up for the second time, she said, "It's going to feel so surreal once I'm up there. I might just start crying this time." She then thanked everyone back home and said, "I hope I made you guys proud."

Sweet revenge in beach volleyball

NMI beach volleyball duo Logan Mister and Andrew Johnson bagged a sweet three-set victory over Vanuatu last night.

It was a tough matchup from the opening serve, but Mister and Johnson held on to win, 23-21, 20-22, 15-12, and got the sweet revenge more than a year after coming second against the same team in the 2022 Pacific Mini Games in the CNMI.

V6

From page 20

On what was going on in his mind throughout his competition, he said, "Just do my very best, never give up—it's not how fast you get there but the journey and to complete my race despite not feeling well and the heat. I did it. I held on to what I believed in my mind—God is watching."

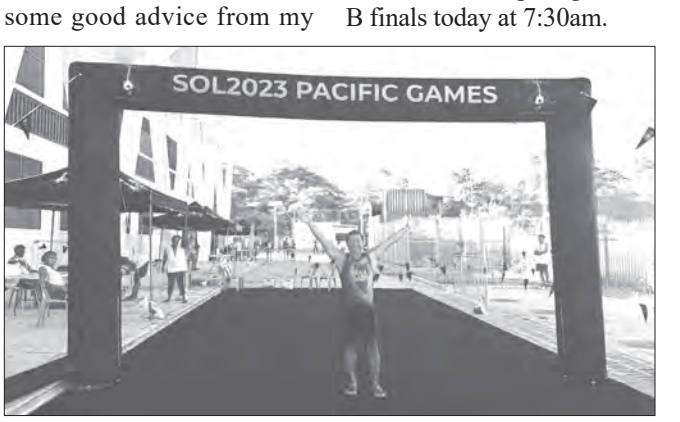
He said, "In the beginning It was challenging as a solo triathlete, but I had some ideas on what to do as a solo athlete and some good advice from my friends and coaches."

For his training on Honiara, Wania said he trained with the NMI swim team at the pool, then on the second week, he ran, went to the gym, and biked.

He said, "Competing in the Solomons was a great experience and I got to see how the organization run the venues."

He then thanked his family, his coaches, and the Northern Marianas Sports Association "for this opportunity to represent NMI. Thank you so much."

Wania is competing in the B finals today at 7:30am.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Leo Wania poses for a photo at the starting line of the bike portion of the triathlon competition yesterday morning.

2023 Honiara, Solomon Islands Pacific Games

LEIGH GASES

The NMI women's V6 1,500m team poses with Samoa's va'a team after their race yesterday morning at DC Park.

The men's V6 1,500m va'a team heads back to shore after their heat yesterday morning at DC Park.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Leo Wania, NMI's solo triathlete, takes a selfie at the starting line of the triathlon event yesterday morning.

LEIGH GASES

NMI's Logan Mister goes for an overhead serve during their beach volleyball game against Tonga yesterday at noon at the SIFF Academy.

LEIGH GASES

Momoko Halstead, steerer of the women's va'a team, along with her teammates look out into the ocean watching the first heat of 1,500m races yesterday morning at DC Park.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Tania Tan is all smiles as she gestures peace signs at the end of her golden finish in the 10,000m event last night at the National Sports Stadium.

LEIGH GASES

NMI's Andrew Johnson leaps for a kill as a Tongan player tries to block during their match at noon yesterday at SIFF Academy.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Logan Mister blocks an attack by a Tongan beach volleyball player during their matchup yesterday noon at the SIFF Academy.

Bucks earn quarterfinal berth by topping Heat, 131-124.

PAGE 16

Saipan Tribune
Sports

Billie retains Powerpuff tiara.

PAGE 18

Gold for Tania in 10,000m

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

HONIARA, Solomon Islands—Gold is the new black and it's definitely Tania Tan's color as she bagged yet another gold medal in her second race, the 10,000m event, in a packed National Sports Stadium last night.

This brings the NMI's medal tally to 12 total—5 gold, 1 silver, and 6 bronze medals.

She really is a runner and a track star and she let everyone in the Pacific know it for the second time as the NMI flag and national anthem wafted through the air after coming from behind and bagging her second gold medal of the Games.

Behind in the first few laps of the 25-lap race, Tan was in a tight-knit pack of four to five runners as New Caledonia's Deborah Kaboer—who was bronze in the 5,000m race—held steadfast in the lead. However, Tan put her running into sixth gear in the last half and overtook everyone ahead of her.

Official times were unavailable at press time, but according to Team NMI and Northern Marianas Athletics officials, Tan timed in at sub 40-minutes and defeated 13 other runners entered in the longest race in Day 3 of the track and field event.

The 22-year-old couldn't contain her emotions after she was interviewed by the press and was hugged by Team NMI chef de mission Nick Gross.

In an interview with media, she said how she somehow managed to continue even as she ran with a side-stitch not even a mile into the race. She said, "It was really painful. I was like 'oh my God, I'm not even one-fourth done.' I don't even think I was even a mile in, but I said, 'no, you have to push through!' and I eventually kept going, which is good—and I ended up coming in first somehow."

On how she felt after her 10,000m race just a couple days after her first gold in the 5,000m race, she exclaimed, "I'm tired. And it doesn't feel good! But I think that's the adrenaline re-

See GOLD on Page 18

LEIGH GASES

Tania Tan beams with pride as she shows off the CNMI flag and her second gold medal of the Pacific Games after the awards ceremony of the 10,000m event last night at the National Sports Stadium.

LEIGH GASES

Tania Tan in her final lap in the 25-lap 10,000m race last night at the National Sports Stadium.

Fifth gold medal for NMI

Runner Tania Tan picked up where she left off, winning the 10,000m run in the 2023 Pacific Games last night in Honiara, Solomon Islands.

After clinching the gold medal in the 5,000m run last Monday night, Tan returned to the track oval and handed Team

See FIFTH on Page 18

V6 women reach semis; Leo completes solo task

By LEIGH GASES
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REPORTER

HONIARA, Solomon Islands—The va'a team is always up bright and early for practices and competition, but their 1,500m events were delayed for two hours as they aligned the course buoys properly at DC Park yesterday morning.

Even with the long waiting time, battling fatigue, and pushing through sickness, the NMI National Va'a Team persevered and the women's V6 1,500m team reached the semis.

They finished third with a time of 13:47.42 behind finalists Tahiti (10:24.18) and Fiji (10:41.43).

Steerer Momoko Halstead said of their race, "Racing against and alongside the best in va'a is an honor. Conditions were challenging, but we persevered through the rough waters with astounding teamwork and resilience. We stayed in our lanes, didn't huli (flip), didn't get any disqualifications, and came back to shore safely."

She added, "I'm proud of our NMI va'a team. We are all better with the experience we have gained here [in the] Solomon Islands."

The women's V6 team also includes Gracie Mendiola, Jenisha Dubrall, Vinalynn Oronigo, Dayna Macaranas, and Sakura Halstead.

The men's team on the other hand, was DQ'd as they missed the exit buoys and finished at 9:17.49 in their heat.

For Leo Wania, the lone representative for triathlon, he also pushed through sickness and took on a big challenge of his own—swimming 400m, biking 10K, and running 2.5K alone through the heat and humidity of the Solomon Islands.

Although he finished last in his heat with a time of 49:49, he said, "When opportunity is knocking on your door, you really have to think about all the possibilities, and no matter what the outcome is, you did your best to represent NMI."

See V6 on Page 18

LEIGH GASES

The women's va'a team paddles during their heat in the 1,500m event yesterday morning at DC Park.

2023 PACIFIC GAMES MEDAL STANDINGS
(As of November 29, 2023 | 6:30PM)

COUNTRY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
New Caledonia	68	42	43	153
Tahiti	37	20	8	65
Australia	34	41	41	116
Samoa	30	16	14	60
Fiji	14	18	23	55
Papua New Guinea	12	22	21	55
Solomon Islands	11	24	21	56
New Zealand	8	9	10	27
Nauru	7	11	6	24
Guam	5	4	4	13
Cook Islands	5	3	5	13
Marshall Islands	5	3	2	10
Northern Mariana Islands	4	1	5	10
Kiribati	3	2	5	10
FSM	2	11	6	19
Vanuatu	2	3	6	11
Tonga	1	6	7	14
Wallis and Futuna	0	4	6	10
Tuvalu	0	3	0	3
American Samoa	0	2	2	4
Palau	0	0	3	3
Niue	0	0	1	1
Norfolk Island	0	0	1	1
Tokelau	0	0	0	0

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